SALES INTROVERTS

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE FRAMEWORKS

Complete Series

by kyle asay

FRAMEWORKS>PROCESS | BOOKS 1-4

CONTENTS

FRAMEWORKS>PROCESS | BOOKS 1

SALES INTROVERTS

Territory Planning + Pipeline Generation Framework

CONTENTS

Territory Planning + Pipeline Generation Framework

Introduction

The most frequent question I receive from sellers joining the Qualtrics sales team is, “what should I focus on first to hit the ground running?” One of the most frequent questions I receive from leaders is, “how do you onboard new reps?” My answer to these questions is always centered around pipeline generation.

The objective of this ebook is to teach the foundational elements of successful pipeline generation: knowing your territory, knowing your prospects, and executing optimal activities.

By applying the frameworks taught in this eBook, AE’s will avoid:

- Wasted time searching daily for accounts to work
- Frustrating prospects with irrelevant messaging
- Ineffective busywork

Leaders will learn how to:

- Quickly onboard their new hires
- Build systems that drive outcomes rather than output

Let’s get started!

Territory Planning

Considering that a sales rep's assigned territory is how they make money, it's surprising to me how rare it is for a seller to know and understand what's in their territory. When a new AE joins my group, priority number one is helping them understand how to organize, understand, and optimize their patch for sustained success.

Prioritize Accounts

Most reps place too much weight on revenue and employee count when prioritizing their accounts. If they work for a mature company, they will often put too much weight on an internally calculated "Account Score" heavily influenced by revenue and employee count. Heavy reliance on an Account Score metric is suboptimal for two reasons:

- Data quality (especially for privately held companies) is usually garbage
- These quantitative measures don't tell the whole story

Would you rather sell to a company that does $5 billion in revenue with no evident use case for your product or to a company that does $50 million in revenue with multiple clear use cases for your product?

If you are like me, you choose the latter. I recommend that that reps manually prioritize all accounts based on Use Case and Budget. Here is how I have had my teams tier their accounts:

Priority 1 - Use Case and Budget
Priority 2 - Use Case or Budget
Priority 3 - No Use Case or Budget

Here's a simple, practical example of prioritization in terms of a luxury car salesman:

PRIORITY 1	Middle-aged professional. They can drive and they have discretionary income.
PRIORITY 2	*(Use case, no budget)* Teenager. They can drive but won't likely have discretionary income.
PRIORITY 2	*(Budget, no use case)* Retiree on their private island. They have money but don't need a car on their little plot of paradise (I hope this is me in 30 years...)
PRIORITY 3	Pre-teen. They can't drive and almost certainly don't have discretionary income.

Ideally, you can have your sales operations team add a custom field in your CRM with a picklist to assign each of your accounts one of these scores. If that's not an option, building out in Excel or Google Sheets is a suitable alternative.

Once organized, plan to spend most of your time on Priority 1 accounts. Plan to use high volume / automated approaches + SDR support on Priority 2, and never look at Priority 3 accounts again. Once organized, let's move forward with optimizing the territory.

Understand Business Models of Priority Accounts

Once we've established that an account likely has a budget and a use case for our solution, it's time to optimize our approach to that account by ensuring we have a strong understanding of their business model.

My favorite question to validate the strength of this understanding is: "If meeting with their executive team, how comfortable are you discussing their business in their language and tying your solution to their goals?" Even if an account is a seller's priority account, they don't always understand their business model, challenges, or how the solution they sell explicitly helps that type of organization.

I recommend initially tackling accounts where you are comfortable having that executive conversation. While these may have lower upside, they are more substantial short-term bets for winning revenue. Then,work to learn about the challenges and opportunities in those larger, more complex accounts so they become a priority account in the future. This approach optimizes short-term pipeline creation/win-rates while also building towards longer-term, bigger bets.

Over time, you should optimize and expand your territory. You optimize through a deeper understanding of your initial Priority 1 accounts. You grow your territory as your understanding of different industries and use cases promotes previous Priority 2 accounts where Use Case was uncertain into new Priority 1 accounts.

Metrics to Track and Success Criteria

TERRITORY PENETRATION

I recommend reviewing all of your Priority 1 accounts at least once a month to look for new leads (internal promotions/role changes and external hires). Additionally, no Priority 1 account should go more than 30 days without outreach.

CUSTOMER EXPANSION

If you wait to expand your solution at renewal, you'll face budgetary issues as your customer likely planned a flat renewal. Effective customer expansion happens months in advance of the renewal date. Keep a running list of your customers that renew in the next six months to stay organized. Then, actively plan your upgrade approach.

My favorite framework for upgrading customers ist to list the problems you are currently solving for each account. Then, identify problems you should be solving, along with who at the company is likely responsible for solving those problems. Ensure you have meetings scheduled with each customer to confirm they are satisfied with how your solution solves their current problems and work to earn their referral to other contacts facing the issues you should solve.

Customer Name	Problems We Currently Solve	Problems We Should Be Solving	Contact Responsible for Solving
ACME	Increasing first call resolution	Decreasing # of product returns	Danny Green - VP Quality Assurance

Prospecting/ Pipeline Generation

PRIORITIZE CONTACTS

Just as you need to understand the types of companies most likely to have a strong use case for your solutions, you need to understand the contacts/titles within those accounts that are the most likely to benefit. These personas should be readily available from your enablement team or sales leadership.

Once you can comfortably identify your target prospects, develop a deeper understanding of those personas. That requires looking beyond the personal descriptions most companies provide their sellers.

UNDERSTAND PRIORITIES OF KEY CONTACTS

Before you could ever hope to articulate how your solution can help, you need to know what's top of mind for your target prospects: what they care about and how they are measured.

First, an exercise I recommend is to read job descriptions for open roles in the same department as your target prospect. The tasks and expectations assigned to a product manager are likely related to the VP of Product's priorities.

If no open roles within the account relate to your prospect, look for comparable positions at competitors. This level of research is generally sufficient to begin effective prospecting.

MESSAGING

It's impossible to have effective messaging without understanding your prospects' priorities. However, it's common to have ineffective messaging even with that understanding. This framework is to help you optimize messaging once you have the required foundational knowledge of your prospects and your value proposition.

This framework is also channel-agnostic: it's applicable for cold email, cold calls, inMails, or any other verbal or written outreach. I'll write it in terms of written outreach, but every aspect also applies to cold calls.

OPENING

The primary purpose of your first sentence is to convince your prospect to open your message. Accomplish this by making the first sentence unique to the prospect, so it's clear that it's not part of a mass campaign.

An easy way to check your first sentence for adherence to this principle is if you could use that same sentence for similar professionals. If you could recycle your opening for other prospects, it's too generic and more likely to be deleted.

Don't overcomplicate this component! Your opening doesn't need to be insightful or even value-driven - it just needs to be unique. I've had success referencing a contact's previous employer, college, or tidbits from their LinkedIn. You are just working on standing out from the dozens of canned (and ignored) emails so that they read your insightful and value-driven content in the rest of your message.

INTENT OF OUTREACH AND EVIDENCE OF VALUE

Now that they are reading your message, you need to give a clear reason for reaching out and supporting that with evidence that you can provide value. A seller that doesn't understand their prospects' priorities will have an insufficient basis for reaching out that may sound like, "I'm reaching out to find 15 minutes for us to make introductions."

A seller that does understand those priorities will be able to supply a valid reason and will sound like, "I'm reaching out because of your focus on improving the success rate of new products."

Once you give a valid reason for outreach, your prospect needs to have a compelling reason to respond. Do this by providing evidence that you can help with something they care about, ideally with a specific value proposition and relevant case study. Specificity is essential: tie your solution to outcomes that your prospect cares about and then provide proof of success in that area.

Bad example: We help organizations increase their revenue/decrease costs through data-driven decisions.

This is a poor example because it's too vague; every company claims to increase revenue or decrease cost, and vague = skimmed = deleted email.

Better example: Product leaders improve the success rate of new products by using Qualtrics to get the market/customer insight they need to make great development decisions. Microsoft improved product development by rapidly receiving and understanding customer feedback throughout their development cycle with our insights platform.

CALL TO ACTION

Keep your call to action short and direct. Depending on the audience, you may ask for a meeting or a referral.

TRYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Hi prospect,

Did you come across Qualtrics while working at Nike? *{Unique to the prospect's work history}*

I'm reaching out because of your focus on improving the success rate of new products. *{A valid reason for reaching out because their role directly relates to this subject}*

Product leaders improve the success rate of new products by using Qualtrics to get the market/customer insight they need to make great development decisions. *{Explanation that we provide value to similar personas}* Microsoft improved product development by rapidly receiving and understanding customer feedback throughout their development cycle with our insights platform. *{Evidence that we have a track record of providing that value}*

What is the best way to earn 15 minutes of your time? *{Clear call to action}*

You are still unlikely to convert a high percentage of initial outreach into set meetings even with optimized messaging. The best pipeline generators combine effective messaging with an organized, scalable process.

Prospecting Cadence/ Strategy

Most sellers understand that it takes six to eight touches to earn a response. Few sellers exhibit that type of follow-up; fewer make those touches effective.

A follow-up email asking, “Did you see my previous email?” is not an effective touch. Yes, they likely saw your email. No, they did not find your outreach compelling enough to respond. You are just reminding them that they chose to ignore your first email.

A cold call with no voicemail is a waste of time. Be intentional with your outreach - if a cold call goes unanswered, be ready to leave a voicemail that explains why you are reaching out and request a response to your email(s). I’ve found most prospects would prefer to email than call back and making a reply email my voicemail call-to-action helped drive higher response rates.

Follow-up messages should introduce new relevant value propositions and additional case studies. It took five follow-up emails to earn a response from what became my first six-figure deal. The problem I outlined and the case study I provided in that message was the first to fit their priorities and earn their interest. Had my fifth email been “Just circling back to see if this was of interest to you,” the deal would never have happened because my initial value hypothesis was the wrong fit.

METRICS TO TRACK AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

There are many top-of-funnel metrics organizations track: call to contact, contact to conversion, talk time, response rate, etc. For this framework, I've decided to focus on how I have measured daily effectiveness for myself and my teams over the last several years. I try to have an outcome-oriented management style because I've seen different AEs find success in different ways. That said, my top performers have consistently earned eight "points" a day using this operating rhythm:

Prospects added to cadence	One point per ten contacts added.
Prospecting calls with correct contact	One point for each (notice how I track conversations, not calls; I've found that monitoring calls leads to busy work and AEs mindlessly making calls to contacts they know won't answer).
Custom inMails/Emails sent to Director level contacts or higher	One point per five messages sent.
Initial meetings set	One point per set.
Opportunities created	One point per opportunity.
Personal development	One point for an hour spent on personal development (learning business models of key accounts, learning about prospects' priorities, etc.).

Here's what a successful day could look like:

Twenty new prospects added to cadence	Two points
Two correct contacts	Two points
Five messages sent	One point
One IQM set	One point
One opportunity created	One point
Personal development completed	One point
TOTAL	**Eight points**

Conclusion

Most sellers want to focus on “advanced skills” - presentation, negotiation, value selling, etc. While I strongly endorse improving those skills, most sellers will see a more significant impact on their revenue by first mastering the foundational skills outlined in this eBook and holding themselves accountable to daily outputs that lead to solid outcomes.

Incrementally increasing win rate is not as impactful as significantly improving pipeline generation. Consistently delivering strong pipeline generating activities will produce more than mastering negotiation.

Once you’ve mastered these fundamentals and have an ingrained operating rhythm, improving your other skills will have an even more significant impact by deploying your talent across a much larger funnel of opportunities.

The following section will help you optimize your top-of-funnel results by converting more initial meetings into qualified opportunities through successful discovery.

SALES INTROVERTS

Discovery Framework

CONTENTS

Introduction

Running an effective discovery is one of the best ways to simplify and accelerate your deal cycles. Unfortunately, few sellers consistently engage effectively in this stage of the sales motion.

I put together this guide to help sellers accelerate their understanding of running an effective discovery. There are two sections:

1. Discovery Pitfalls
2. Discovery Exercises

The pitfalls section addresses the six most frequent and detrimental mistakes sellers make in discovery and how to avoid those mistakes. The concluding section provides three exercises you can do today to enter future discoveries more polished and prepared to add value and differentiate yourself through effective selling.

SALES INTROVERTS

Discovery Pitfalls

PITFALL #1:

Setting an agenda, not an objective

Many discoveries start with the same agenda:

1. Mutual introductions
2. Discuss your role and challenges
3. Overview of our product
4. Agree on next steps

The problem with this agenda is that we ask the buyer to give (help me understand you) before they are sure talking to us is a good use of their time.

The sole reason why someone takes time for your discovery is so they can determine if and how you can help them. If a buyer is not confident from the beginning that you'll quickly answer the question "what can you do for me," they will be less willing to answer your discovery questions. **Executives with discovery fatigue are unlikely to answer your questions patiently and will often counter with some form of: "you asked for this meeting - why don't you just tell me what you do?"**

Starting a discovery call by setting the objective rather than an agenda is the best way to earn the right to ask discovery questions, even with the most senior of buyers. When done correctly, it sounds something like this:

“By the end of the call today, I will be able to tell you specifically how our solution will help you drive A, B, C. To get to that point, I will need to understand better your role as it relates to X, Y, Z.”

For a seller of a forecasting solution, selling to a VP of sales, it may sound like this:

The Give

“By the end of the call today, I will be able to tell you how our solution will improve forecasting at the company, region, and team levels. I’ll also help you understand how you can increase win rates by surfacing key deals to your visibility earlier in the sales cycle.”

The Ask

“Before providing specific recommendations, I will need to understand better your role as it relates to forecasting and deal reviews.”

Moving from setting an agenda to setting an objective is a subtle shift. Still, when the prospect understands your commitment to providing what they care most about before the end of the call, they are more willing to share more about their processes, goals, and pains. When they are confident they will receive what they care about within the first call, they will be less likely to interrupt your discovery with, “why don’t you tell me what you do.”

PITFALL #2:

“Tell me about your role”

Notice in my recommended objective set that we get specific from the onset: “tell me about your role as it relates to X, Y, Z.” This is much more effective than “tell me about your role” for a few reasons:

No one wants to explain their role every time they get on a sales call.
Much of their role likely has nothing to do with your solution.
Asking someone “tell me about your role” indicates you are unprepared for the call.
A senior buyer will likely get impatient with this question, thinking, “if you don’t know what I do, how could you presume you could help me?”

Think about the psychology of the buyer:

They are not likely looking forward to a discovery call with a stranger
They question whether or not you know enough to add value to their role
They are concerned that the discovery meeting will only benefit you, and not them

Starting off the call with, “tell me about your role” validates those concerns, and will lead to them mentally checking out.

Making it clear to your buyer that you are educated about what they do and what they care about will set a peer-to-peer tone for the conversation that leads to deeper discovery.

PITFALL #3:

Front-loading Discovery Questions

Most sellers are familiar with the concept that discovery should have roughly even talk time for the seller and buyer. Unfortunately, even when a 50/50 split is achieved, it often ends up being an interrogation for the first half of the call and then an ineffective “demo through words” monologue for the last half. The most effective discovery calls are comfortable conversations, where the seller works to add value throughout the call, and talk time is balanced throughout the discussion.

One of the easiest ways I’ve found to intermix value with discovery questions is adding context to questions with a phrase like “the reason I ask is....” Then, the reason for asking should be a customer story or a thought-provoking challenge.

Let’s again use the example of selling a forecasting solution to a VP of sales to illustrate that point:

“How are you currently determining which deals you should personally be reviewing with the rep? The reason I ask is {company name} improved their win rate for $50k+ deals by 15% after moving beyond the common framework of prioritizing only by deal size, and I’m wondering which other deal criteria may be influencing your involvement.”

This simple change will lead to more balanced conversations where the call pattern is to extract value, give value, extract value, and give value, rather than extract, extract, extract, give, give.

PITFALL #4:

Not extracting the “so-what”

Take a look at your notes from your most recent discovery conversations. Do they all look pretty similar? If so, chances are your discovery is too superficial.

Here’s what I often see when reviewing deals at Qualtrics:

Current State: Data silos, poor analytics.
After State: Reduced data silos, improved analytics.

When I see this, my first question to the seller is, “so what?”

Data silos aren’t always a bad thing - why is it bad for your buyer? Improved analytics sounds nice... but so what? What business decisions are going to be positively impacted with improved analytics? What types of data will we be able to surface that they currently can’t access?

Sellers are good at asking questions, writing down the answer, and moving on to the next question. Sellers are terrible at pausing, looking at what they wrote down, and ensuring they can articulate the impact, or the “so-what,” before moving on to the next topic.

“We are operating with data silos” should be met with “I’ve seen varying issues stem from inefficient data sharing - can you help me understand what’s particularly painful about your situation?” This leads to deeper discussion than just writing down “data silos’’ and moving on to your next discovery question.

“ Sellers are good at asking questions, writing down the answer, and moving on to the next question. Sellers are terrible at pausing, looking at what they wrote down, and ensuring they can articulate the impact, or the “so-what,” before moving on to the next topic. ”

PITFALL #5:

Seller only prepares to learn, not to teach

Most sellers understand the importance of preparing for discovery meetings. However, that preparation is usually spent on:

- What do I want to learn from the buyer?
- What questions should I ask to uncover that information?

Your competitors are also preparing to meet with your buyers, and what they want to know/what they plan to ask matches your list.

In most competitive evaluations, a buyer sits through several discoveries, and they all seem the same. The best way to stand out from the competition is to ensure your buyer leaves the conversation feeling like they gained value; they didn't just answer questions.

For your ideal buyers, I recommend spending as much time planning what you will teach your buyer as you spend preparing the questions you want them to answer. While your competitors badger them with all the same questions they've heard repeatedly, you will be able to intermix your questions with insights that matter.

Here are some areas to focus your research on:

1. Research conducted by your company that supports best practices for their use case

2. Relevant customer stories (people love to learn about others with similar challenges and changes they made)

3. Industry trends/challenges (try Googling, “challenges facing *insert industry*”)

Don’t feel pressure to tie these teachings back to your product/service. The goal is to leave your buyer feeling they received value by meeting with you even if they never purchased your offering.

Average sellers differentiate with their company’s offering. Elite sellers also differentiate by adding value in every conversation. Your buyers will be excited to continue the conversation if you teach them valuable insights during discovery.

PITFALL #6:

Being afraid to ask for clarification

When you put someone in a stressful situation, they will naturally avoid behavior that may appear weak or unconfident. Even tenured reps (including myself) can find discovery conversations stressful.

Unfortunately, many sellers feel that admitting confusion is a sign of weakness/lack of control and have a hard time telling their buyers that they aren't 100% following their explanations of their current state, challenges, or goals. This avoidance is a massive problem: pretending you understand what your prospect is saying ruins your discovery.

When reviewing calls, if I hear a rep say, "that makes sense," I'll usually pause the recording and ask them, "did that actually make sense to you?" They often admit they didn't fully understand what the prospect was communicating; it was more comfortable moving to a new topic rather than admitting confusion.

Moving on to a new topic without clarity on the prior is essentially abandoning a problem or opportunity that your buyer felt significant enough to communicate. Even worse, your buyer probably knows what they just told you could be a little bit confusing for an "outsider" to understand and know that your "that makes sense" is not sincere.

Avoiding this pitfall is simple: don't be afraid to admit you are slightly confused or even completely lost. The best sellers are comfortable asking for clarification, further explanation, or even a restart and rephrase of what their prospect is communicating. Qualified prospects would prefer taking extra time to align understanding rather than waste time later sitting through an irrelevant presentation.

Instead of "that makes sense," try, "I'm not sure I'm following. Can you explain…" and you'll have more meaningful discoveries.

SALES INTROVERTS

Discovery Exercises

To avoid the previously covered discovery pitfalls, you'll need to build foundational knowledge about your product and target personas. This is an ongoing exercise; it's no secret that top sellers become experts in their space and the space in which they sell.

Here are a few additional exercises you can incorporate immediately to improve your discoveries:

Exercise #1: Initial Analysis of Prospect's Current State

List the primary responsibilities of a prospect's role (related and unrelated to your solution). To find these, pull from their LinkedIn profile, job descriptions of open positions within their department, or job descriptions of similar roles at similar companies. Highlight the aspects of their role that pertain to your solution. These are the areas where you will want to uncover further detail around their current process. Related to Pitfall #1, these responsibilities make up the X, Y, Z from the objective set: "To get to that point, I will need to understand better your role as it relates to X, Y, Z."

Prospect's Primary Responsibilities	Related to your Solution (Y/N)	Current State (fill in during discovery)
Responsibility #1		
Responsibility #2		
Responsibility #3		
Responsibility #4		

Exercise #2: Value Hypothesis

In addition to understanding their general role and responsibilities, you also need to understand their priorities. Make a list of all the outcomes your prospect is likely trying to drive. Then, isolate the outcomes that your solution influences. These are the areas where you'll want to prove your solution can improve to the prospect. In other words, these outcomes make up the A, B, C in the objective setting phrase: "...I will be able to tell you specifically how our solution will help you drive A, B, C."

If you get to the end of discovery, and they still don't have a concrete understanding of how you can specifically help them, they will be unlikely to schedule the next event and will defer with some form of "send me some case studies, and I'll review with the team." You can decrease this risk by coming to the conversation with a semi-baked value hypothesis prepared.

Prospect's Primary Outcomes	Impacted by your Solution (Y/N)	Value Hypothesis (bring to discovery and validate)
Outcome #1		
Outcome #2		
Outcome #3		
Outcome #4		

Exercise #3: Table-stakes vs. Differentiators

Write out the common “after scenarios” your buyers describe. List the “table-stakes” functionality that accommodates that vision. Then, identify adjacent, differentiating features that your product offers. Consider how those differentiators would improve the common “after scenarios” provided by your buyers. Now, when your buyers describe where they want to be, you are ready to expand their vision to an even better state, which your offering is uniquely positioned to provide.

Prospect’s Common After Scenarios	“Table-stakes” Features	Differentiated Features	Expanded After Scenario
After scenario #1			
After scenario #2			
After scenario #3			
After scenario #4			

Conclusion

Discovery calls often stress sellers due to their unpredictable nature. While we can enter the call with some hypothesis, it's impossible to plan too much of the call in advance without falling into the trap of following a script. Leveraging these frameworks will help you enter discovery with more confidence, and maintain control of a value-driven conversation.

Mastering this will take more time and effort than using the same pre-planned questions for each discovery, but the payoff will be well worth the investment.

An effective discovery will lay the foundation for a compelling solution presentation. The following section will help ensure you take advantage of a strong foundation by executing successful presentations.

SALES INTROVERTS

Solution Presentation Framework

CONTENTS

Introduction

While you can't do an effective solution presentation without a great discovery, you can certainly ruin a solid discovery with a lousy presentation/demo.

This guide will help sellers accelerate their understanding of running an effective presentation. There are two sections:

1. Solution Presentation Pitfalls
2. Solution Presentation Exercises

The pitfalls section addresses the six most frequent and detrimental mistakes sellers make in presentations and how to avoid those mistakes. The concluding section provides three exercises you can do today to enter future presentations more polished and prepared to add value and differentiate yourself through effective selling.

SALES INTROVERTS

Solution Presentation Pitfalls

PITFALL #1:

Ineffective use of slides

I've seen many sellers start their presentations with an apology: "I know no one likes slides, but..." and then they proceed to ineffectively walkthrough irrelevant content and lose their buyers' attention right from the beginning.

Slides aren't inherently bad, but having too many or misusing them, is a great way to crush buyer engagement.

I'd argue that no presentation should have more than eight slides. If you need to cover more content than you can include in eight slides, consider a different format for that content or break the content up into separate meetings.

When you have previously used more slides, it may seem difficult to cut back to as few as eight. Here are my rules for slide inclusion and elimination:

eliminate

1 Company History/Accolades

Few people care about your company's founding story. Nearly no one cares about your revenue or growth rates outside of your investors. Except for your marketing team, few people care about the random awards your company has won. 99% of "awards" you see companies put in press releases and slide decks have less clout than "The Dundies."

2 Customer Logo Slides

No one cares what other companies bought your software. Your competitors have customer logo slides that look the same. No deal was ever determined by a buyer saying, "but vendor A has Facebook and Microsoft as customers!"

3 Tech/Feature-Heavy Slides

If there's relevant functionality you need your buyer to know you offer, include it in your demo. Think about buyer psychology: are they more interested in looking at a screenshot of a feature or looking at the feature live?

include

1

Slides For Discovery

If there are concepts that you need to explore with your customer further, include slides that have content geared towards that conversation. This provides a comfortable give/take cadence to add value/educate on a topic while engaging in deeper discovery.

My favorite slide that falls under this category is a slide that summarizes your understanding, so far, of the buyer's current state, negative consequences, desired after state, and expected positive outcomes. It's a great slide to 1) dig deeper with your primary contact(s) and 2) validate and expand with new contacts added to the conversation.

2

Software Architecture overview

You aren't going to demonstrate every feature your product offers (especially after you've read this eBook and applied these lessons). You may even skip significant components that you need your buyer to know you offer.

To ensure a holistic understanding of your offering, use a slide that diagrams the major aspects of your solution as you set the demo agenda. Call out specifically what you are going to show and why. Call out what you aren't going to demonstrate and how it fits into your overall solution, so they know it's available.

3

Relevant Customer Stories

The ideal customer story shows you solved the main problem your buyer faces for a company in their industry. The ideal customer story also rarely, if ever, exists, despite how much you complain to marketing.

A suitable alternative for the ideal customer story is one story showing you've solved your buyers' problem and another example of your solution working for a similar company. Together, these two customer stories will provide suitable social proof to mitigate some of the risks your buyer perceives in onboarding a new vendor.

Apply these rules so next time you have a presentation that includes slides, you can present confidently, knowing that you have the right recipe for an engaging conversation rather than a lifeless monologue.

PITFALL #2:

Only selling towards gathered requirements

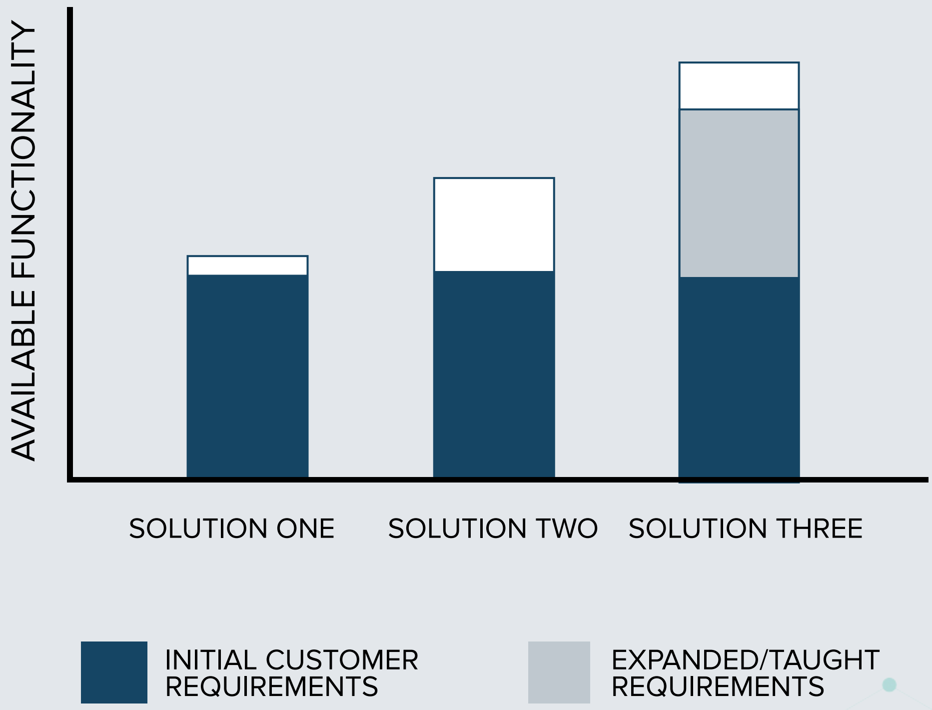
Sellers become excited when their prospect lists all the features they need and know their product checks all the boxes. The product demo seems to go well as the prospect confirms that the demonstrated solution meets all of their requirements. All signs are positive up and through the proposal review until the seller learns that the prospect chose a cheaper solution that also met their needs.

Regardless of the sophistication of your company's solution, you have lower-cost competitors that offer a significant portion of your product's functionality. Your prospects aren't experts in your solution - they just know the problems they want to solve and will usually envision the most simple possible fixes to those problems, regardless of the actual efficacy. Those simple fixes are covered by functionality that all competitors share in your space. When multiple providers meet a customer's required capabilities, the lowest cost wins.

To avoid this pitfall, build on what your prospect thinks they need with your product's differentiators. You need to enhance their decision criteria to encompass features/value that only you can provide; successfully doing so effectively buckets your lower-cost competitors as entirely different solutions and defends your higher price point. When executed successfully, the sales campaign ends with the prospect eliminating the lower-cost competition, despite meeting their original decision criteria, because the additional illustrated capabilities are now requirements for success.

If you sell for the low-cost provider in an industry, you can tweak this motion to your advantage. Explain to the customer what your higher-cost competitors will claim aredifferentiators. Then, explain why your buyer wouldn't see significant benefits from those "bells and whistles," and take a confident position in providing a solution that "does everything you need without asking you to pay for what you don't."

If your competition doesn't successfully leverage the tactic I've described in this section to reframe the required capabilities, you'll win.

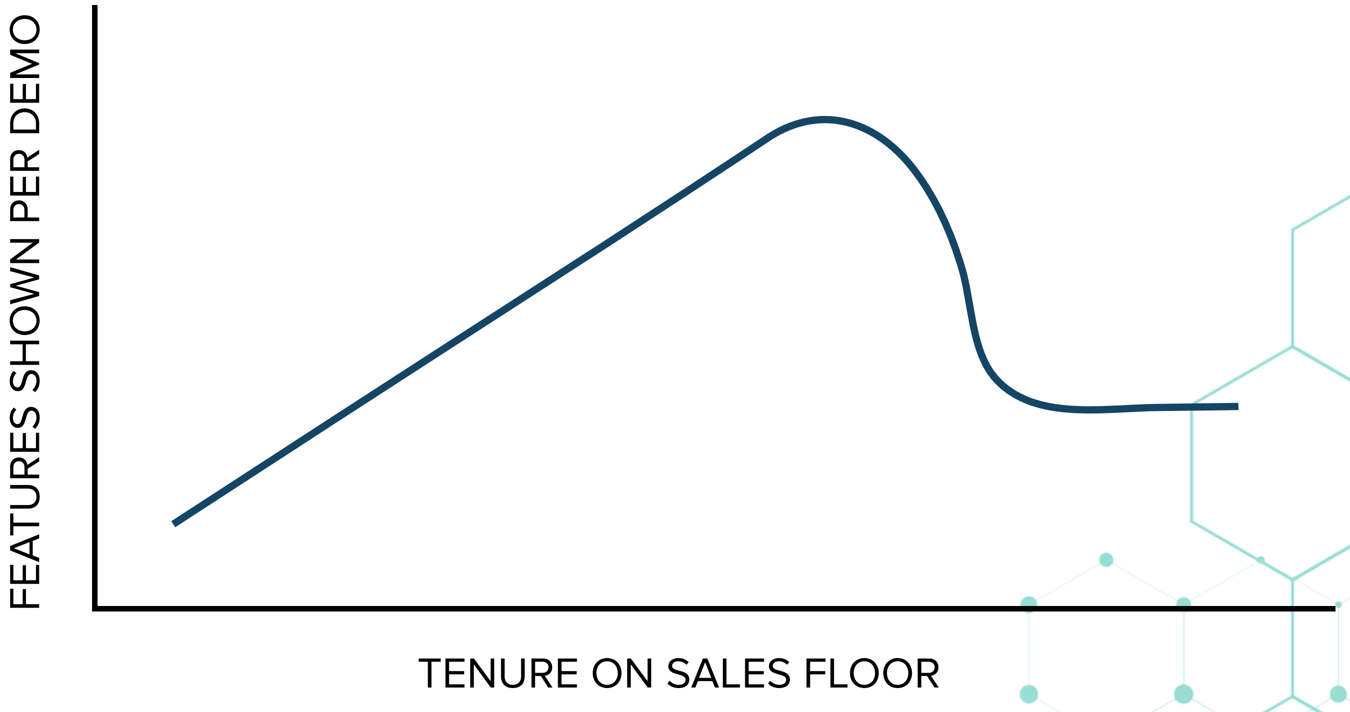


In this example, Solution One will win unless Solution Three's seller successfully expands the customer requirements beyond what Solution One and Two cab provide.

PITFALL #3:

Overwhelming with irrelevant complexity

While it's excellent advice for sellers to master the product they are selling, it's generally a poor idea to showcase that extensive knowledge in a product demonstration. If I were to chart the average number of features I showed per demo across my tenure as an AE, you would see a gradual increase for the first two years as I mastered more of the product. Then, when I learned "feature dump" demonstrations did not win deals, you would see a rapid decrease in the number of features shown per demo.



The customer sentiment when a rep falls into this trap is, “well, this solution looks great… but it’s way more than I need right now.” Even if they see value in some of your differentiators, if even 20-30% of what you show is irrelevant to them, they will assume that your solution is at least 20-30% overpriced for their needs.

Mastering product knowledge is less about knowing all the features and more about quickly matching the most relevant features you offer with problems your customer has and then helping your customer envision how the solution solves those problems. The better you understand your solution, the more likely you’ll be able to find the optimal way to solve a disparate set of problems for your customers.

The easiest way to avoid this pitfall is to plan your demo agenda with the question, “how would my prospect use this feature, and how would they benefit?” If you can’t answer that question, consider eliminating that feature from your demo. This concept ties directly into the next pitfall.

PITFALL #4:

Your prospect cannot visualize how they would use your solution

Not many people walk into a store, see something they think looks interesting, and think, “Wow, that looks cool. I have no idea how I’m going to use it, but I’ll buy it anyway and figure out how to use it later.”

Professionals behave similarly: they won’t purchase a solution they can’t envision in their environment. A strong high-level overview gets a buyer to agree to a demo. Knowing how they’d use your solution to solve their problems brings a buyer to sign a contract. Don’t waste valuable demo real estate with high-level content as your buyer is already past the part of their journey where it is needed.

The way to prevent this pitfall is to **eliminate the phrases “high-level overview” and “50,000-foot view” from your product demonstrations.** Instead, when prepping your demo ask, “how would the customer use our solution if we gave them access today?” and then show them a demo that aligns as closely to that as possible. If that answer is unknown, do not move onto the solution presentation stage of the deal.

If you can’t answer that question before your demo, then your customer won’t be able to answer the question “how would I use this solution” after your demo, and no one buys a tool they don’t know how they would use.

PITFALL #5:

Abandoning Discovery

“Check-the-box” sellers move out of a discovery mindset after the initial conversations with their buyers. Top sellers maintain a constant curiosity, leading to ongoing discovery.

I’ve found product demonstrations to be one of the best times to engage in deep discovery. I believe this is because we have the opportunity to give our buyer(s) context for our questions. Here’s how discovery may play out differently for a vendor selling an analytics solution, based on context:

Initial Discovery

Seller: Help me understand your current process for data analysis.

Buyer: Explains.

Seller: How would more efficient analytics improve your situation?

Buyer: Uhhhhh… I’d analyze things… more efficiently?

Seller: Wanna see a demo?

Ongoing Discovery

Seller: On our previous call, you helped me understand a few gaps with your current analytics process. Let's look at how our solution would handle that process more efficiently.

Seller: Demos relevant analytics functionality.

Seller: How would this demonstrated solution change your approach to analytics?

Buyer: Provides fantastic and inspired answer.

Seller: How would this more efficient approach impact you, your team, and your business?

Buyer: Convinces themselves to buy your solution with their answer.

Deep discovery requires context. Initial discovery helps you get the context you need from your buyer to begin a solution presentation. Starting solution presentation gives your buyer the context to move with you into the deeper discovery you'll need to win complex deals.

PITFALL #6:

Not applying the Pareto Principle

The Pareto Principle is the concept that 80% of consequences come from 20% ofcauses. In sales, the most common applications of this principle are:

The top 20% of sellers earn 80% of the commission
The top 20% of your territory will yield 80% of your results

I would argue that this principle also applies to how SaaS products are effectively presented.

80%+ of the functionality you cover in your product demonstrations is offered by your competition. If you spend most of your demonstration covering that functionality, you lose because you are not differentiated.

Instead, spend 20% of your time covering that 80%, and call out that you know it's table-stakes functionality that everyone offers. Be direct and upfront that you are taking this approach, using phrases like, "I know everyone you are evaluating offers this - I just wanted you to briefly see that we do as well."

Then, spend 80% of your time covering the 20% that differentiates your product, explaining why it's different, why it matters, and how similar customers have seen value by having access.

Leave your prospect thinking about your unique differentiators they can't live without, rather than wondering why they would pay a premium for a solution that primarily looks like the competition.

“ 80%+ of the functionality you cover in your product demonstrations is offered by your competition. If you spend most of your demonstration covering that functionality, you lose because you are not differentiated ”

SALES INTROVERTS

Solution Presentation Exercises

Exercise #1: Differentiation + Value

Build a list of the most common requirements you hear from prospects. For each requirement, include a differentiated feature and its value. Where possible, attach a case study to the differentiators. Refer to this document frequently until the motion of “if you think you need x, you also need y, here’s the value of y, and here’s a story that proves it” becomes natural.

Common Requirements	Differentiated Feature	Benefit of Differentiated Feature	Customer Story
Requirement #1			
Requirement #2			
Requirement #3			
Requirement #4			

Exercise #2: Eliminate the fluff

Review a recording of a recent demonstration and list every feature shown. Then, highlight the ones your prospect would most care about. Rebuild your demo agenda, remove the non-highlighted features, and include the value provided / case studies from the Differentiation + Value exercise.

Exercise #2: Effective demo agenda creation

When preparing for a demo, imagine that you have been hired to do the job of your primary contact. Write out your top priorities, then highlight the ones your solution addresses. For those highlighted priorities, how would you use your solution to address? In other words, if you had their job and had access to the product you currently sell, how would you implement the solution? That should look very similar to your demo agenda.

Conclusion

An inferior product tied to a superior presentation can beat a superior product presented poorly. Regardless of where your company's product currently stands in the market, you can increase your win rate by applying the principles shared in this framework.

Mastering these skills will take more time and effort than memorizing a demo "script," but the payoff will be well worth the investment.

An effective solution presentation progresses deals, but there is plenty of work to be done after the buyer verbally confirms your solution would improve their current state. Our final section will help you understand how to navigate the latter stages of your deal cycle successfully so your opportunities don't fizzle towards the end.

FRAMEWORKS>PROCESS | BOOK 4

SALES INTROVERTS

End of Deal Framework

CONTENTS

Introduction

The next steps are easily defined in the early stages of the deal cycle: Discovery > Demo > Pricing. After pricing, sellers frequently lose control. Proposal reviews often end with the buyer saying, "let me sync internally with the team and get back to you

on the next steps." Unless you respond appropriately, this phrase is often the beginning of the end of your hopes of closing the deal.

Poorly handled, your buyer takes control of the deal cycle, which is a problem because your buyer is rarely:

1. Trained on effectively selling
2. As motivated to buy as you are to sell
3. Aware of all internal processes required to obtain approval

I put together this guide to help sellers:

1. Better prepare their buyer to sell internally successfully
2. Increase their level of control, even at the late stages of the deal
3. Maximize their deal size through effective negotiation

To drive those outcomes, I address the six most frequent and detrimental mistakes sellers make at the end of a deal and how to avoid those mistakes.

SALES INTROVERTS

Late-stage Deal Pitfalls

PITFALL #1:

Confusing After State with Positive Outcomes

Most SaaS deals heavily involve buyers who would either use your product or manage the people using your product. For these buyers, improving their current process as measured by ease of use or efficiency/automation will usually draw enough interest to evaluate your product.

However, once these buyers seek approval to purchase your solution, executives further removed from the usage will be looking for more tangible benefits than “easy to use” and “automated.” Executive approval requires differentiation between the After State and Positive Business Outcomes.

The After State describes the new, improved environment your buyer will experience after implementing your solution. The Positive Business Outcomes need to articulate the impact of the After State, not just expand with additional detail.

Here’s what it frequently looks like for deals I review at Qualtrics:

AFTER STATE *POSITIVE BUSINESS OUTCOME*	More personalized data collection Improved response rate for surveys
AFTER STATE *POSITIVE BUSINESS OUTCOME*	Automated closed-loop follow-up Unhappy customers helped faster

These examples fall short because the Positive Business Outcomes are only more specific descriptions of the After State. Stand-alone, they have no defensible/quantifiable value.

Here's how I would revise the above example, increasing detail for the After State and adding a measurable Positive Business Outcome:

AFTER STATE	More personalized data collection + Improved response rate for surveys + More "at-risk" customers flagged
POSITIVE BUSINESS OUTCOME	Decreased customer churn
AFTER STATE	Automated closed-loop follow-up + Poor customer experiences are addressed faster
POSITIVE BUSINESS OUTCOME	Increased customer retention

When your buyer requests budget from an executive, they need to articulate the impact. The After State answers the question, "What does your software do?" Positive Business Outcomes answer the question, "What impact will it make?"

Don't misunderstand: a compelling After State is not immaterial, especially when you apply the advice from Pitfall #2 in my Solution Presentation Framework. While strong business outcomes are needed to secure final approval, an exciting After State is required to motivate your buyer to request that approval.

The next pitfall will help you understand how to differentiate between motivating your buyer with outcomes they care about while enabling them with business impact.

MOTIVATE

Individuals evaluating your solution have a full-time job outside of evaluating new vendors. Every hour spent with you and internally advocating for your solution is

time away from influencing metrics that impact their core responsibilities and compensation.

If your solution does not motivate your buyer by clearly mapping to a personal priority, your deal will stall as they prioritize their core job over meeting with you.

Here are a few ways to find what motivates your buyer:
- What metrics measure their performance?
- What systems/processes are hurting their attainment of the above metrics?
- How would they measure the success of implementing your solution?

Once you have a motivated buyer, you need to enable them to sell on your behalf.

ENABLE

Your champion's biggest problem is rarely their boss's biggest problem. It's seldom the company's biggest problem. Armed with only the value your solution brings them, a motivated buyer will often find executives telling them, "this isn't a priority for the business right now - let's revisit in a few months."

It would be debilitating to know how many of your "strong" deals died when your contact had a two-minute conversation with their boss ending with swift rejection. Even the most motivated buyers will wilt at pushback from executives if they aren't armed to sell internally.

Fortunately, it's easy to uncover what the business cares about because so much is publicly available (annual reports, recent news, etc.)

PITFALL #2:

Not motivating *AND* enabling your buyer

Unmotivated buyers will not attempt to push your proposal through multiple approvals. Motivated but non-empowered buyers will fail to gain approval. Consistent winning requires motivating and enabling your buyer:

	NOT ENABLED	ENABLED
NOT MOTIVATED	no opportunity	opportunity fizzles early
MOTIVATED	budget denied at executive level	closed/won

In addition to what you can find on your own time, here are a couple of questions you can ask:

Q

What significant changes have the organization made recently and why?

How would the organization measure the success of implementing your solution?

You'll find your buyer is more willing to answer these questions once you've motivated them by tying your solution to what matters most to them.

Let's look at how these come together using a hypothetical buying scenario, where the seller offers sales enablement software and sells primarily to sales leader personas.

For this solution, let's use these as the After State + Positive Business Outcomes:

AFTER STATE	Decreased rep ramp time
POSITIVE BUSINESS OUTCOME	Increased rep productivity
	+ Decreased cost of sale/increased profitability

If selling to a VP of Sales, which from the above do you think is more **motivating** to them?

Their promotion path, compensation, and goals align more with increasing new rep productivity and less with decreasing cost of sale.

If the seller engages with the VP of Sales and focuses on decreasing the cost of sale, the deal will stall early. Without a clear understanding of how the proposed solution impacts one of their KPIs, they can't justify spending time away from their revenue-driving priorities to engage in a full-cycle sales motion.

To gain and keep the VP of Sales' attention, the seller should initially focus on a value proposition of:

Improved Productivity > **Increased Quota Attainment** > **Higher Commission**

Now that they are motivated with a personal benefit (higher commission), we need to enable them to sell internally by articulating the organizational value. In our example, that benefit would be increasing profitability by reducing the cost of sale.

Our motivated and enabled VP of Sales is now ready to get executive buy-in with a pitch of "this new solution will decrease our cost of sale by increasing rep productivity."

PITFALL #3:

Scheduling “check-ins,” not progressing meetings

The next steps are easy to define early in the deal cycle. Successful discovery leads to showing the solution, which leads to sharing a proposal for the solution. The seller easily maintains control of the deal through these stages.

However, after the proposal review, the buyer often dictates the next steps:

“Let me talk internally and get back to you.”

This is a pivotal moment where the typical seller loses control of the deal cycle by responding with:

“When should we reconnect to discuss internal feedback?”

The requested reconnect rarely happens as the buyer cannot progress the deal on their side sufficiently to warrant continuing the conversation. Subsequent attempts to re-ignite the discussion become requests to “check-in” on the progress (or lack thereof) that the buyer is making.

Don’t fall into this trap. Instead, to maintain control, find out who they need to talk to and the priorities for those stakeholders:

“I’m looking forward to hearing their feedback. I’d love to send snippets of our presentation for their review, so they have relevant context. To help me isolate the correct elements, can you share who you will meet with and which aspects of our solution align with their priorities?”

Once you understand the above, say:

“We’ve had quite a few conversations - it’s a tall task for you to summarize our takeaways to help your internal team understand the value proposition. I’ll put together a couple of slides to help you bring your team up to speed on our previous conversations and why we should partner together. Let’s grab twenty minutes before your internal sync to get your input on the deliverable.”

Now, you maintain control of the deal cycle by defining a practical next step/reason to continue meeting while also ensuring that you enable your primary contact to sell internally effectively.

PITFALL #4:

Not accounting for Risk of Change

Sellers assume they have a deal as long as their proposed After State is better than the buyer's Current State and are surprised when they lose the deal to "no decision."

Losing to "no decision" does not mean that the buyer didn't see value in the proposed solution. Instead, they weren't convinced that their current State needed to be abandoned. No decision means your buyer is content to keep their status quo.

Sellers forget that getting to a new After State requires change. Change = risk, and people are generally risk-averse. The proposed After State has to be better than the Current State + Risk of Change to win. As you are finalizing your business case with your buyer, make sure you aren't only quantifying the value of the proposed solution. You also need to mitigate the Risk of Change.

The best way to counteract the Risk of Change is to introduce the Risk of the Status Quo. The Risk of Status Quo should be a combination of negative consequences your buyer is aware of + negative consequences you unveil.

Identifying and teaching negative consequences is an essential skill worthy of its own book. Fortunately, that book has been written: The Challenger Sale by Matt Dixon. If you haven't read it yet, I strongly recommend doing so.

Deal lost when After State <= Current State + Risk of Change

Deal won when After State > Current State + Risk of Change

OPTIMAL APPROACH:
After State + Risk of Status Quo > Current State + Risk of Change

PITFALL #5:

Negotiating price prior to finalizing scope

Sellers often have a predetermined “floor” for their more significant deals. This number is often tied to quota attainment, promotion qualification, or a goal commission amount.

A savvy buyer will try and get a seller down to that floor as quickly as possible. They keep all potential features, options, and volume on the table and negotiate price off of that “optimal package.” The seller is happy to negotiate because:

1. The buyer seems to want a “premium,” higher-cost option
2. They are still above their floor

After negotiating the price down on that package, which is often at or near the predetermined floor for the seller, the buyer will remove features or reduce volume. The dreaded email/call often sounds like this:

“Thanks for working hard on getting the price down for us. We’ve done more internal due diligence and no longer need features a,b, or c, and we can reduce users from 3,500 down to 2,500. Can you please provide an updated quote with those changes?”

Now, the seller is in a bind. They've already agreed to offer the optimal package at a specific price point. With the customer drastically reducing scope, it's unreasonable to say, "sorry, the price for the significantly lower scope is the same as the previously discussed package," so the seller now has to go below the floor they had planned for their deal.

To avoid this pitfall, refuse to negotiate the price until the scope is finalized. When the buyer asks for movement on price, the response should be:

"We are excited to work with you and will certainly ensure we are competitive on price. To prevent unnecessary back and forth, let's finalize exactly what you need us to provide, and then we can iron out the investment details."

Once you have a firm commitment on scope, you can safely begin pricing negotiations without the risk of agreeing to a price you are comfortable with, only to have the scope, and price, unexpectedly decrease.

PITFALL #6:

Proactive discounting

SaaS pricing is constantly changing and is rarely perfect. We've all had deals where we generate the quote, look at the price, and immediately recognize flaws in the model. Most reps will refuse to put a price that they know is too high in front of their customer and will present a proposal and say, "I've included an xx% discount because of *fake reasons* 1, 2, and 3."

In addition to the problem of admitting your solution isn't worth the price, we run into an additional complication: they don't believe they are getting a discount.

I remember negotiating my first seven-figure contract. We made the mistake of presenting a proposal to the business with a 30% discount off the list price. Then, procurement got involved, and they told us that the executive team would not greenlight a signature until they knew they had a good deal.

I explained that we had already baked in a 30% discount and asked procurement to communicate that discount to their executive team. He said, "Kyle, you are completely making up that number for all I know. You can say 'list price' is anything, and I have no way to verify if that's true. For my CFO, a 'good deal' is measured from discounts from the final proposal provided to our business."

In that scenario, we had to discount roughly 10% off of the final proposal cost to get the deal done. The lesson I learned is that we don't get credit for proactive dicounting:

If the list price is $100,000, but you first show the customer $80,000 and then "sharpen your pencil" down to $60,000, your customer will give you credit for the $20,000 discount they saw, not the $40,000 discount you tell them you are offering.

Conclusion

Even the best-run deals can stall if the seller misses critical details at the end of the deal cycle. Sellers can lose thousands of commission dollars a year by making simple negotiation mistakes.

Applying the principles in this eBook will help you increase your control of late-stage opportunities, increasing deal velocity, win rate, and deal size.

I recommend revisiting this guide frequently as you continue your progress towards mastering the complex sale.

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