

GO NAKED

THE CREDIBLE EXPERT



PROVOKING THOUGHT & DISCUSSION

TWO CONVERSATIONS

I want to describe two conversations that exemplify the value and importance that Critical Issue questions can play.

The first example is with a salesperson who had been on territory for around 12 months. They had secured a meeting with a Senior Category Buyer at a large teaching hospital in the South of the UK.

We had gone along to this particular meeting to meet the Senior Category Buyer and unbeknown to the salesperson, they had also brought along their Procurement Manager. So this, on the face of it, was a great opportunity.

The salesperson sat down to begin the meeting and opened the meeting as you would ordinarily expect someone to open a meeting. After some initial small talk, the salesperson asked the Procurement Manager and the Senior Category Buyer the following question:

'What's the most important thing to you?'

Now, at this moment, I want to just pause and let you consider what the answer to that question was from the two procurement people sitting in a UK hospital.

Of course, the answer that came back was *'Price, cost, we want to save money.'*

At this moment in time, the salesperson was understandably on the back foot and he then proceeded to open up his product catalogue, flipped to one of the middle pages, and asked the procurement team, 'Whose equivalent of this product do you currently use in theatre?'

The Procurement Manager said 'I don't know, we don't have that information available. We hold 27,000 lines of stock in our theatres so I don't specifically know which one of those we use.'

'Oh,' said the salesperson, 'You wouldn't happen to know how much the one is that you use, do you?'

'Well, no, of course not. I don't know that information, but more to

the point, don't you know?' exclaimed the Procurement Manager.

Again, the salesperson was on the back foot. For what seemed like the next five or six minutes he continued this cycle of identifying products, asking which equivalents were used, and asking for price information.

In the end the Procurement Manager brought the meeting to a close and said 'You know, I think the best thing for us to do, the best thing for you to do is, if you send me a copy of your catalogue and a copy of your price list, then we'll spend some time going through it and see what we use versus what you have and reconcile that with your price list. If we can save any money, then we'll get back in touch with you.'

With that they stood up from the table and walked back to their offices.

Now contrast this with the second procurement meeting:

A salesperson with a similar tenure on territory walked into a very similar scenario. This time it's a large teaching hospital in the North West of the UK.

As the salesperson walked into the meeting, again he was met with a Senior Buyer and a Procurement Manager. The Procurement Manager said to the salesperson 'I'm really pleased that you have come today'; and with that he dropped onto the table an A4 lever arch folder full of invoices. He said 'I'm really pleased you came today because I wanted to go through each of these invoices, line by line, and look to see where we can save some money and where we can save on some carriage charges.'

At this point the salesperson paused and said, 'We can certainly look at that as I know that you've got a key objective for the rest of this year to save 5% on non-pay spend. One of the things which I had identified in my research ahead of this meeting with you, was that the Trust had recently spent £1.3 million on a piece of capital equipment for theatre and as I saw that, I considered the challenge that you, as procurement have and the difficult balance which

you try to manage between continuing to reduce the deficit and managing a budget, whilst all the while trying to ensure that the hospital remains at the forefront of technology and innovation and also ensuring a positive public profile for the Trust within the local area. I was really interested to get your thoughts on that balance and that challenge. So perhaps you can spend a little time talking to me about that, and how you've tried to manage that balance over the last 12 months and what your plans are for the next 12 months?'

For the next 30 minutes we sat and listened to the Procurement Manager and a Senior Buyer describe a number of the challenges which they faced in trying to reduce the deficit whilst all the while maintaining a positive public profile and continuing to be ahead in terms of technology and innovation.

We explored a number of areas of interest to them and at the end of the meeting the Procurement Manager said, 'You know, I'm sorry we don't have any more time to continue the discussion and also I'm aware that we didn't get to talk through these invoices and all the carriage charges, but perhaps we can schedule another meeting together. Before you go, there is somebody else who I think you would be interested to talk to, because we recently appointed a new General Manager and I think that they would value a discussion with you too.'

So that meeting was left with another meeting in the diary for Procurement and a meeting booked as a referral with a newly appointed General Manager.

Now there's nothing clever, sophisticated, or fancy about the differences in these two conversations or the approach.

Both were relatively inexperienced salespeople with similar tenure in their role.

It's just that the first example relied on the salesperson to ask a series of funnelled questions, asking, 'What's the most important thing to you?' en route to trying to identify a need; whereas in the second conversation, there is a salesperson as a **Credible Expert in their field**, as somebody who has researched the organisation, who's identified a Critical Issue, and who has raised that with a key customer in order to have a **thought provoking, credible, important, and relevant discussion**.

As you think about those two conversations, think about which one of them is more likely to lead to a successful and positive outcome.

The first one is an example of what I would call 'old world' or 'traditional' selling. The latter is an example of what is required to sell and be successful in today's modern selling environment; it's an example of a Credible Expert who can identify Critical Issues and questions about Current and Future States.

As you think about that, just consider the steps that we've discussed so far:

1. To identify a Critical Issue which affects that particular customer or trust.

a. Those Critical Issues need to be researched, need to be credible, important, and relevant, and visible in three areas:

- i. Macro – things which affect everyone. The market or macroeconomic factors.
- ii. Strategic – things which are present in the organisation's strategic objectives
- iii. Micro – things which can be seen in the key priorities of the organisation, the daily tactical activities that individuals and departments are focused on.

2. Once those factors have been identified through research, they need to be raised to a customer along with the question – a Four Lens question – to provoke thought and discussion.

Now at this point, I just want to pause, and raise something that was asked of me recently. I was asked, "Should we try to link that Critical Issue to our product or service, or our solution?" I just want you to consider the difference in those two procurement conversations. Because **if you think that this conversation is about making a quick sale, then you're missing the point**.

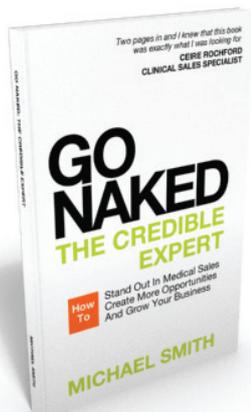
In the second conversation, the discussion never moved to the company's product, service, or solution. It was a conversation about the customer and the things that are important to them. **It was a conversation that was framed from the customer's perspective and it was a conversation that was congruent with the customer's world**.

Simply by being able to have that type of discussion, it puts you ahead of the majority. That type of discussion was an incredibly important and relevant discussion about a Critical Issue, which you've identified, raised, and discussed – differentiating you from the competition.

So if you do nothing else at this point, the customer sees you as a Credible Expert in your field.

Do you want to be thought of as a sales rep? Somebody who is there to ask a series of funnelled questions, to elicit information in order to identify a need, and then push your features and benefits?

Or do you want to be seen as a Credible Expert in your field? Someone who is able to relate to the customer's world, who is able to have a thought-provoking discussion as somebody who sees things from the customer's perspective.



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