

SPIN Selling Summary

Brief Recap

SPIN Selling was the result of a large study of big ticket B2B sales. The study found that in successful sales calls it's the buyer who does most of the talking.

And how do you get a buyer to talk?
By asking questions.

So that long held belief that good salespeople are not necessarily good talkers was finally proven to be correct.

It also revealed that the **good salespeople did not just ask any old questions.**

They asked certain types of questions and often in a particular sequence.

Hence the acronym of **SPIN**

Situation (questions)

Problem (questions)

Implication (questions)

Need-payoff (questions)

The first students trained in the "SPIN" model showed an average of 17% improvement in sales results.

Let's look at the question types in detail.

I believe, however, there are certain omissions from the SPIN Selling Model. Things that would make it even more effective.

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Situation Questions

Questions seeking facts are called Situation Questions.

They are necessary.

They help uncover a context for uncovering buyer problems.

You need some facts in order to be able to put forward a reasonable solution / proposal to your prospect.

However, let me ask you a question.

Who benefits more from these situation questions, you or the buyer?

That's right, situation questions are of more benefit to the seller and not the buyer.

And here is some more interesting information gathered during the SPIN Selling research.

The more situation questions in a call, the less likely that call was to succeed.

Most salespeople ask a lot more situation questions than they realized.

So, while it is true that most buyers would rather talk about themselves or their business than listen to a sales pitch the research has shown that the more senior the buyer, the less they like answering factual questions.

And I think this is quite understandable.

If you walk into a sales call with no knowledge about the business of your prospect you are showing a lack of respect.

You are wasting their time getting them to give you information that you should already have. And if this was

important back in the 1980s it is even more important now as we approach the 2020s.

So, this implies that successful sellers ask fewer Situation Questions because they do their homework.

I have often been told in the past that Good selling = good planning.

To quote "SPIN Selling" "...effective planning takes you more than half way to effective execution"

Apart from doing your homework to minimize Situation Questions and planning the situation questions you are going to ask before you meet your prospect you need to focus on the key information that you need.

(I was taught to ask targeted questions.)

SPIN Selling goes into the planning of Situation Questions and also the phrasing of Situation Questions so that they "help the buyer see you as a problem solver rather than an interrogator." The right Situation Questions can lead smoothly and naturally into discussion about your prospect's problems. The SPIN book even goes into "Low Risk" and "High Risk" questions to ask and the appropriate times to ask them.

So, SPIN Selling states that sellers need to ask more questions but asking too many situation questions reduces your chances of sales success. Conversely, the more of the other types of questions asked during a sales call the more likely a sale will be made.

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Problem Questions

[Examples of SPIN Selling Questions](#)

The first of these other questions are Problem Questions.

If you are relatively new to selling then practicing problem questions is probably the single most important thing that you can do to improve your sales results.

Problem Questions ask about the difficulties and dissatisfactions the buyer is experiencing and focus the buyer on this pain while clarifying the problem. They give rise to Implied Needs which are the raw material for Implication Questions.

An example of a Problem Question could be, “What prevents you from producing a product with lower return rates?”

Inexperienced sales people ask less problem questions than their more experienced colleagues.

And not only do more experienced salespeople tend to ask more problem questions they also tend to ask them sooner in the sales meeting.

Problem Questions require planning. SPIN Selling suggests working backwards from the problems your products solves for a buyer to generate these questions. There is a full chapter in the SPIN Selling Handbook that explains how to

work backwards to the problems your product (or service) solves.

So, what problems does your product solve? Write down your answers now.

SPIN also advises that after you identify a problem it's important to continue revealing and clarifying the problem until you and the buyer share a thorough understanding of the problem.

This is not surprising, I well remember the quote, (but not the author), that says:

People do not buy from salespeople because they understand their products but because they felt the salesperson understood their problems.

The SPIN research uncovered that top salespeople tended to introduce solutions, products or services very late in the discussion after they had understood the problem and uncovered Explicit Needs.

They held back and discussed the effects of the problem before talking about solutions. They also uncovered several problems before asking implication questions. It can be dangerous to focus on one problem as it invites the buyer to raise another area where your solution does not fare so well. (Don't put all your eggs in the one basket)

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Implication Questions

Implication Questions discuss the effects of the problem, and develop the seriousness of the problem to increase the buyer's motivation to change. They are best used before talking about solutions.

Implication Questions are the most powerful sales questions and unlike Problem Questioning skills the skill in using Implication Questions doesn't automatically improve with experience.

New salespeople being inexperienced often do not see a clear link between the buyers problem and their solution. As salespeople become more experienced they can more readily see the link between problems and solutions.

This leads to another problem. Experienced salespeople seeing this problem/solution link often jump in quickly to offer solutions before the buyer is ready.

In contrast the most successful salespeople held back and discussed the effects of these problems before talking about product or solutions. Questions about the effects of the consequences of the buyer's problem are called Implication Questions. They are the most powerful of all sales questions because they help the buyer see that the problem is serious enough to justify making a change.

An example of an implication question:

“Could the higher return rate of your products give your competitors an advantage in the marketplace?”

Implication questions are powerful because they induce pain.

They build the consequences of the buyers problem and in so doing make the buyer more anxious for a solution that will take the pain away and stop after all people buy when the pain of the problem is greater than the cost of the solution.

In Spin Selling terms these questions are so effective because they take Implied Needs and develop them into Explicit Needs.

Implication Questions are harder to plan for than Problem and Situation Questions and to use them you must have a certain amount of business knowledge and be very aware of the problems your product solves.

The SPIN Selling Fieldbook goes into how to plan these questions, how to vary the questions that you ask and how to link your questions. The idea behind doing this is to make your questions sound fluid and natural rather than an interrogation.

Furthermore, the book states that you should “ask Implication Questions as much to understand as to persuade”.

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Need-Payoff Questions

Need-Payoff Questions get the buyer to tell you about their Explicit Needs and the benefits your solutions offers, rather than forcing you to explain the benefits to the buyer. What these questions do is probe for explicit needs and getting the

buyer to state the benefits has greater impact while sounding a lot less pushy.

It is often said that selling is not about convincing buyers but about creating the right conditions to allow buyers to convince themselves.

Needs Payoff Questions ask about the value, importance or usefulness of a solution.

For example:

“How much would you save if we could reduce the return rate of your products?”

“What effect would that have on your reputation in the marketplace?”

The thing is these questions focus on solutions and because of this buyers rate calls that are high in need payoff questions as positive, constructive and useful.

Need payoff questions are a mirror image of implication questions. For example an implication question might be “Could the higher return rate of your products add to your costs?”

Whereas a needs payoff question might be

“If you had lower return rates would that cut costs and improve profitability?”

These questions have a unique function in that they get the buyer to tell you about the benefits your solution offers rather than forcing you to explain the benefits. Getting buyers to talk about the benefits you offer is more impactful and seems a lot less pushy. It also has a tendency to reduce sales objections. And during the thinking process initiated by your needs payoff questions buyers often extend the

payoff to new areas. Not only that but since they've thought of the payoffs they are more committed to your solution since they experience some sort of ownership.

Given that there are often no perfect solutions in a complex sale, getting your prospect to generate a number of payoffs is wise because if you focus on only one positive result you run the risk of the buyer focusing on the areas that you don't solve rather than the ones you do.

Once again the book goes into details about how to plan Need Payoff Questions (and using the ICE Method), how to phrase them, and when to use them.

Reminders

Reading this summary in NO WAY replaces the experience of reading one of the SPIN Selling books.

I cannot hope to cram 200 pages of sales wisdom into a 10 page summary.

So, do yourself a favour and buy one of the SPIN Selling books (personally I prefer the SPIN Selling Fieldbook) or better still attend one of the sales courses they run. I'm very confident it will be worth your time and money.

Please note that Rackham himself says in his books it is not wise to follow a rigid system of selling, that's just not the way it is in the world of selling, you need to maintain your flexibility.(e.g. you may not always follow the SPIN questions in strict order.

Anyway, enjoy the summary and if you want to see better sales results apply what you read and further your study by learning more and refining your SPIN Selling ability.