



Effective Occupational Medicine Sales Through Effective Questioning

■ FRANK H. LEONE, MBA, MPH

A productive occupational medicine sales effort is predicated on your ability to identify a prospect's need and then to match that need with your services. Both require knowing when and how to ask the right questions.

Why is Questioning So Important?

Invariably, you begin your association with a prospect as "just another salesperson." You must set yourself apart from the start. Breaking the ice to pique interest is one area in which well-constructed questions can secure the participation and active interest of a prospect. For example, you *could* say, "Hello, I am from Tiptop Urgent Care and I would like to talk to you about our services," but you might elicit a more insightful response if you say, "Tiptop Urgent Care works with employers to lower unnecessary health and safety costs. Tell me a little about your most significant challenges in this area."

In two sentences, you have piqued interest ("Tell me more...") and elicited a need ("I'd like to lower our workers' compensation costs...").

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

After breaking the ice, the art of questioning continues to play a significant role throughout the sales call.

You should speak as little as 10% to 20% of the time and use most of that time asking relevant questions, probing (i.e., asking the prospect to expand on vague, yet critical, terms such as "quality" and "responsiveness"), and using questions to move your prospect through a logical sales process.



Frank Leone is president and CEO of RYAN Associates and executive director of the National Association of Occupational Health Professionals. Mr. Leone is the author of numerous sales and marketing texts and periodicals, and has considerable experience training medical professionals on sales and marketing techniques. E-mail him at fleone@naohp.com.

Interest

Always seek a prospect's "permission" to speak/meet and offer a "roadmap" regarding the objective and likely course of your contact. Seek permission to continue with the call by asking your prospect, "Is this a good time for you or would you prefer to schedule our call (meeting) at a more convenient time?"

This courtesy takes your prospect off the defensive. If you quantify the expected time allotment ("This should take no more than five minutes..."), you may be surprised how many more prospects are willing to speak with you.

Secondly, advise the prospect why you are calling and the planned course of the conversation. Securing the desired level of focus and interest from the respondent is dependent on their understanding of the reason for your call from the outset.

Credibility

Once you have engaged your prospect, you need to establish your clinic as a credible resource. Brief, fact-seeking questions provide useful insights about the prospect company while allowing you the opportunity to appear engaged and interested in what the prospect has to say. Effective questioning keeps objections to a minimum while you are building the case for your clinic.

Identifying Needs

As you dig deeper into a prospect's experience, policies, and strategies, you will be better positioned to identify needs. The need may be simple and easy to match with your services or may require broader, more innovative programs.

Commitment

Commitment means obtaining a prospect's buy-in to your proposed solutions. The typical salesperson presents the solution and waits for the "buy" signal. However, it is generally more effective to achieve commitment by asking questions. ■