

Can You Handle the Truth?

Knowing if a sale really exists.

By Henry Ching, Sales Trainer & Coach @ Progress-U Limited



Finding out the truth

Have you heard the story of the Legendary Great White Elephant Hunter (LGWEH)?

The LGWEH heard of the rare white elephant and was determined to hunt it down and add it to his trophies. He set off into the jungle with his team, equipment, supplies and guns and ... was never seen again!

Why am I telling you this story? What has this to do with sales?

Because this kind of thing happens to salespeople too. Especially when they find their equivalent of a GWE sale. The sale they must add to their trophies. They ignore all the signs that tell them there is no sale. But it is so tempting to spend time and energy because if they can get it, they will be legends.

But here is a truth for you. Legends sometimes go hungry.

I knew of a saleswoman many years ago who spent a significant amount of her sales year selling to a new prospect. She also spent a significant amount of her employer's time and money on this sale. She flew in her executive management to meet with the new client and invited the new client to lavish corporate events and dinners. She wrote proposals, designed solutions, offered free consulting and gave presentations to the prospect.

The client was in a bind. They did not want to be rude to her as she was so nice to them.

BUT THERE WAS NO SALE!

They even had a meeting amongst themselves to 'pick straws' as to who would tell her this. They should have told her earlier. It would have saved a lot of embarrassment and resources.

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However, I have no sympathy for the saleswoman.

She should have gotten to the TRUTH earlier. But this was a trophy win to her (and her management team was caught up in this craziness, too).

Salespeople are in the business of getting sales (and customers). Not trophies.

So how do we avoid wasting our time and resources chasing down a sale that does not exist?

The only way is to get the prospect to tell you the truth.

This brings up an important issue. Why do some clients avoid telling you the truth? Is it because they enjoy keeping you 'in the dark?'

No, most people are not mean like that. I think its because they don't trust that you can handle the truth. They actually may even care about you as their salesperson.

So how do we address this problem - getting to the truth.

I don't think we should give the responsibility to the customer. Their aim is to buy something - not to help you sell.

There are many ways of getting to the truth. Actually, that reminds me of a movie called A FEW GOOD MEN starring Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise who are facing off against each other in a court-room. Tom was the hot shot lawyer who shouted at Jack, 'I want the truth!'. Jack's response was 'You can't handle the truth!'

Can YOU handle the truth?

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If you can, then read on. Firstly, you must set up the conditions for getting to the truth. They must think you can handle it. The most fundamental step is to gain their trust. They must trust you can deal with the truth. Then they will be open with you because they believe that you will not mis-use it or even worse go off the rails.

But what can you do to find out the truth?

You must ask powerful questions. I find in Asia that a lot of customers feel uncomfortable getting asked a lot of questions so please be sensitive to this. Typically, customers here are open to more questions when they feel a good connection, or good rapport with you. So work on that first. If you are skilled in building relationships, this can be achieved in 1-2 meetings.

At the same time please remember the story of the saleswoman above. She must have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions and most of her year avoiding the truth. This is such a waste and even worse, she was not doing her job.

She should have found out there was no sale and moved on and sold something to someone else.

What kind of questions are important to finding out whether there is a sale (for you)?

These are the most important ones:

- Is there a budget allocated?
- Is there a genuine need or want that the customer is sufficiently motivated to satisfy?
- When does the customer want to make a decision?
- Are you talking to the right person?

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Even if the answers to all the above are positive, there is an even more important question.

Is the customer going to buy the solution from you?

They may be genuinely interested in buying something but they may choose to buy it from your competitor.

What to do about this? And how do you know?

I'll answer the second questions first.

I believe you can trust your intuition to a large extent. My theory is that most salespeople 'know' when they are winning. I have a saying 'If you don't think you are winning, you are probably losing'. But intuition can only take you so far. Once again, if the customer trusts you, they will tell you if you ask them.

What question can you ask the customer to find out if you are winning?

How about...

"Mister customer, how do you rate my chances of winning this business?"

I am not joking. This is a tough question to ask but ask yourself this question.

'Can **I** handle the truth?' (Or is delusion preferable?)

I am not suggesting we do not follow our hearts and use our passion. This is very important as it drives us to do what is personally important and relevant. But we must use our intellect, too. This assists us determine what is realistic.

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There is a saying that sums up my philosophy on many things and certainly this topic.

"The Intellect should always be the servant of the Heart, and never its slave." August Comte (1798-857)



Henry Ching is a Sales Trainer and Coach at Progress-U Limited. Henry works with sales managers, salespeople, entrepreneurs and anyone else who want to further develop their sales skills and methods using Best Practice thinking. Today, even top sales performers face ever-increasing challenges in:

- How to shorten the sales cycles;
- How to avoid being drawn into a margin destroying price war;
- How to qualify better so they work on higher quality deals;
- How to close effectively and
- How to maximize the return on investment on the sales efforts made.

Henry assists his clients in tackling these challenges through Progress-U's innovative and unique "Stop Selling!" approach and by sharing his extensive experience gathered during his corporate career.

Henry is known for his creativity and humour when it comes to tackling difficult sales situations or working on complex deals. He has developed sales strategies and training that have helped many clients address their sales challenges. During his corporate sales career at IBM Australia, Fujitsu and Information Builders, Henry has worked with Blue Chip clients like Mercedes Benz, HJ Heinz, Dun & Bradstreet and the Australian Defence Force. He succeeded in highly competitive sales environments that required thinking 'outside the box'.