

Ask the Coach

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The Fact Finder – The Sales Person’s Best Friend?

It’s an axiom of sales trainers that great agents do what average agents don’t do. Use of a complete fact finder is a prime example.

As a mentor, agent and business coach, I’ve found that agents have a range of responses to using fact finders:

- They Hate Them
- They Put Up With Them
- The Great Agents Use Them Religiously

It’s often a sign of “sophistication” that agents say “I don’t use a fact finder – only a legal pad.” As a selling error, failure to use a comprehensive fact finder is on par with failing to prospect consistently and effectively. I have rarely seen an outstanding agent who doesn’t fact find on a consistent basis, and who doesn’t ask important and penetrating questions.

How Great Agents Benefit From Using a Fact Finder In Six Ways

Step 1

They ask their clients and prospects: *What’s Important?* How they discover this: they ask important fact questions and record the answers on the fact finder.

Step 2

They ask their clients and prospects: *Why are these issues important?* They record the answers to these feeling questions on the fact finder as

well. When you discover what's important, and why it's important, you then have a legitimate basis for your recommendations. High pressure selling (the old selling paradigm¹) often ignores the true needs of the buyer, which often leads to high pressure sales tactics. The new paradigm (the partnership model¹), bases recommendations on what the client truly needs, not just what the seller wants to sell. The partnership selling model results in a natural and relaxed request for the buyer to select your products/services. Using a fact finder assures you that your products and services are appropriate to the client's needs.

Key Learning Point: It is a critically important strategy to use the fact finder to guide you to the appropriate product/service recommendations. If you ask the right questions, the buyer will almost always tell you what they want – and need – to buy.

Step 3

They ask their client: *Who's important to you?* The two most important elements of the sales cycle are prospecting and selling. Steps one and two, above, are the critical steps needed to move the selling process along. Step three – *Who is important?* – is the critical step in the prospecting process. In the ebook, *10 Steps to Building a Referred Lead Engine*,² obtaining the names of people important to your client is step four out of the ten steps. It's not until step seven (out of ten) that these names are introduced for further discussion. As indicated above, prospecting is best understood as a process, and completing each of these ten steps is required to obtain the result you want (which is a continuous flow of high quality prospects). When you ask *Who is important?*, you are certain to receive the names of people you want to talk to in the future. One of the biggest roadblocks to obtaining referrals is lack of names to prime the prospecting discussion. If you regularly ask *Who is important?*, you are well on your way to solving your prospecting problems.

Step 4

Great Agents also discover the names of *key decision influencers*. Many sales decisions are made by more than just one person. Examine the chart below:

1 Green Light—Red Light—Yellow Light, Nicholas R. Ray, CLU, RHU, ChFC, MBC: www.coachnickray.com/columns.htm#green

2 10 Steps to Building a Referred Lead Engine, Nicholas R. Ray, CLU, RHU, ChFC, MBC: www.coachnickray.com/products.htm#vol3

Product Type	Obvious Decision Maker	Other Key Decision Influencers
Family Life Insurance	Insured Spouse	Non-Insured Spouse Friends Accountants Business Managers Other Relatives
Group Health Insurance Plans	Your Contact	CFO, CEO, Accountants Board Members Other Company Employees
Estate Planning Life Insurance	Insured(s) Estate Owners	Business Managers Close Friends CPAs Estate Planning Attorney

Agents often lament the fact that people other than the insured may impact the decision. But, if you examine key decisions you've made, you may often have consulted with others as well. We should expect our clients and prospects to do the same. Consider using this language:

"Mr. Prospect, whenever I make a key decision like you are about to do, I often consult with my spouse, my boss, and my CPA. How does it work for you – who do you consult when you make a key decision like this?"

This is a key question. Failure to discover the key decision influencers may doom your sale. You must discover and talk with these people. Why?

- You may discover a key factor your buyer either hasn't revealed or may not even be aware of.
- You may discover the real reason your prospect is talking to you – and it may not be because he/she wants to buy from you. (Perhaps the prospect is just checking the competition to keep his/her current vendor honest. He may have no real intention of buying from you.)

Key Learning Point: In order to discover true buying motives and be able to present the best possible solution, you must talk to all parties influencing the buying decision. In some cases, you may discover you do not have a legitimate prospect.

Step 5

Great Agents discover their client's *buying style*. Recent key research has revealed that there are five basic buying styles. In their book, *5 Paths to Persuasion*,³ Miller and Williams describe the process they used to discover this data. 1700 managers in ten industries were interviewed and asked just two questions:

- How do you make decisions?
- How often did the sales people present information in a manner that was effective for you?

The answers were astounding and can be seen in the chart below:

Buyer Types	% of Buyers	% of Sellers Providing Information Appropriately	% of Sellers Providing Information Inappropriately
Charismatics	25%	4%	96%
Thinkers	11%	12%	88%
Skeptics	19%	48%	52%
Followers	36%	6%	94%
Controllers	9%	30%	70%

Miller and Williams conclude that most presentations do not effectively communicate in a manner that truly serves the buyer. It is well beyond the scope of this article to provide adequate training to deal with this issue, but I hope you will investigate further.

Key Learning Point: Professional sales people would benefit tremendously by learning how to identify, and then design presentations that can be effectively and easily understood by their buyers.⁴

Step 6

Great agents always request a *next action step*. Every sale depends on the buyer and the seller keeping the sales process moving forward. Therefore, the last step in the fact finder is an agreement by both the seller and the buyer to take the next step. What is different about this point? It acknowledges and demands that the buyer participate. Without this participation, the sales process will come to an abrupt halt.

3 *5 Paths to Persuasion: The Art of Selling Your Message*, Robert B. Miller and Gary A. Williams Warner Business Books, New York: 2004.

4 *Executive Impact: 5 Paths to Unlocking Decisions*, Miller Heiman Workshop. Miller Heiman, Inc.: 2004. www.millerheiman.com

For example:

Seller

Buyer

*I will get information
to you by _____.*

*I will send information
to you by _____.*

*I will have a presentation
ready for you by _____.*

*I will agree to meet
with you on _____.*

Key Learning Point: Great agents never allow the process to become unfocused. Either the process continues – or it doesn't, but the great agent always knows whether the process is alive or not.

THE SIX KEY STEPS OF THE FACT FINDER

STEP 1

What is
important?

Facts

STEP 2

Why is it
important?

Feelings

STEP 3

Who is
important?

*Future
Prospects*

STEP 4

Who are
key decision
influencers?

*Influencers?
Talk to
them all.*

STEP 5

What is the
the buyer's
buying style?

*Allows you to
tailor your
presentation.*

STEP 6

What is
the next
action step?

*Do you
have a
real prospect?*

Use these six key steps to take your business to a new level.

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