

SALES | QUICK CARD SA-01

Before you write the proposal

Fifteen minutes, one proposal, and the questions a good coach would ask you.



The practice

There is a moment in many first meetings when the prospective client describes a problem, and the expert, recognising it at once, starts explaining how they would solve it. It feels helpful. It is also, quite often, the moment the sale starts to slip, because the client has not yet decided the problem is worth solving.

Neil Rackham's team studied some 35,000 sales calls over 12 years. In larger sales, the most successful people understood the client's needs before proposing anything. They asked about the situation and the problem, then about what the problem leads to and what solving it would be worth. Those last two kinds of question turn "that's a bit annoying" into "we need to fix this".

Your questions for the next first meeting

Type of question	My two questions
Situation: the facts (keep these few)	
Problem: what is not working?	
Implication: what does the problem lead to?	
Need-payoff: what would solving it be worth?	
Go or no-go: did the client say, in their own words, what the problem is costing them?	

If the answer to the last row is no, you are not ready to propose. An agency sending 20 proposals a year and winning 1 in 4 wins £200,000. Sending 16 and winning 2 in 5 would win about £256,000, from four fewer proposals.

Try this this week

In your next conversation with a prospective client, ask at least two questions about what the problem leads to before you say anything about how you would help. Notice what changes.

Coach yourself

Set aside fifteen minutes where nobody can interrupt you, and answer in writing. An answer looks surprisingly different once it is on paper.

G

GOAL

If more of my proposals were won, what would that change for me?

R

REALITY

In my last first meeting, when did I start explaining what I would do? How many of my proposals go quiet?

O

OPTIONS

What would I need to hear from a client before I write a proposal?

W

WILL

Which meeting is next, what will I ask, and how will I know it worked?

If you catch yourself saying...

You hear yourself say	Try asking instead
<i>"I'm not a salesperson"</i>	What do I do when a client asks for advice? How is that different?
<i>"I didn't want to seem pushy"</i>	What rule am I following when I hold back a harder question?
<i>"I dropped the price to get it over the line"</i>	What was I feeling in that moment, and what did I do with it?

ONE HARDER QUESTION

What if I sent no proposal until the client had told me what the problem costs them?

Keep it going

Old habits return when a big opportunity feels urgent. Count proposals sent, won, lost and gone quiet each quarter, and put check dates in the diary: 3, 6 and 12 months from today.

When to get help

Contract terms, liability and unusual procurement documents are for a solicitor. If you dread every sales conversation, that may need more than new questions: talk to someone you trust.

What a coach adds

This card gives you the questions. What it cannot do is notice which one you avoided. It is one of the SMARTer practice cards, covering the ten key areas of a business that sells expertise.



Talk yours through with me: book a Discovery Call at smarterentrepreneurs.co.uk

No pitch, no pressure, and you'll leave with something useful either way.