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SPIN B2B

HOW TO SELL AT A HIGH PRICE
TO AN UNMOTIVATED CLIENT



Alexey Osipenko

**SPIN B2B. How to sell at a high
price to an unmotivated client**

«Издательские решения»

Osipenko A.

SPIN B2B. How to sell at a high price to an unmotivated client /
A. Osipenko — «Издательские решения»,

This book is a dynamic textbook for B2B salespeople. You'll learn and, if you wish, master the following: — selling without being pushy, asking the right questions; — managing negotiations; — identifying the client's true needs; — addressing their problems and pain points; — overcoming objections like «it's too expensive» and «we're happy with everything» before they arise. Turn your sales into engaging research. Get many grateful clients.

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SPIN B2B

How to sell at a high price to an unmotivated client

Alexey Osipenko
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A L E X E Y O S I P E N K O

SPIN SELLING

*How to sell what
doesn't sell itself*

SALES TECHNOLOGY · BOOK ONE

About This Book

Why does a brilliant presentation hear «thanks, we'll think about it» in reply, while a few right questions end with the client saying «go on, tell me — I don't want to live like this anymore»?

This book grew out of live work with salespeople — with their real clients, collapsed deals, and won millions. Inside is the SPIN technology taken apart down to the last screw: strong questions, the Daisy of implication punches, the scales in the client's head, the triple budget fork, background motivation, the decision-making center, and the first thirty seconds of contact in which everything is decided.

Every chapter is dialogues, mistake breakdowns, rules, and practice. At the end — the SPIN master's checklist of 26 skills. Read with a pencil and five clients at hand: you'll start selling before you finish reading.

Book one of the «Sales Technology» series. Ahead — «The Selling Presentation» and «Objection Handling.»

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The SPIN Master's Checklist

Chapter 1. The Dog on a Nail, or Why a Brilliant Presentation Doesn't Sell

Picture it: America, the fifties. Along the dusty roads between small towns rolls a middle-aged traveling salesman. In his trunk is a marvel of engineering: a mixer that whips five milkshakes at once. Not one, like everyone else's — five! He walks into yet another roadside diner, sets the machine on the counter, and delivers to the owner a presentation that gave me goosebumps the first time I heard it.

He tells the owner roughly this: you're not selling few milkshakes because you don't need my mixer. On the contrary — you need my mixer precisely because you're selling few milkshakes. A customer orders a shake, waits, gets bored, gets annoyed — and next time simply doesn't order. But if you had a five-spindle machine, you'd be whipping shakes faster than you could count them. Increase supply — demand grows. Chicken and egg. And the final chord, a compliment: you're a perceptive, far-sighted man; you can see a good idea from a distance. Well, what do you say?

Beautiful? Beautiful. Logical? Impeccable. There's a benefit, there's a metaphor, there's even a compliment. Now guess what the diner owner answered.

«Well... thanks anyway.»

It's a scene from the film *The Founder* — about Ray Kroc, the man who would later build the McDonald's empire. When I first saw this clip, I literally snatched it out of the film and told myself: this is about SPIN. Or rather — about its absence. I will absolutely show this to the salespeople I train. And I've been showing it ever since — to hundreds of people.

Tell me honestly: how many times have you been that Ray Kroc? How many times have you laid out all your best for the client at once — benefits, numbers, case studies, guarantees — and heard a polite «thanks, we'll think about it» in reply? If even once — this chapter is for you. If many times — this book is for you.

In this chapter we'll figure out why beautiful presentations shatter against the client as against a wall. We'll meet the technology developed specifically not to break through that wall but to dissolve it. You'll learn how a need differs from a problem, how a strong question differs from a weak one, and why the client resembles a dog lying on a nail and whimpering. And at the end you'll get an assignment which — if you do it rather than merely read it — will change your conversations with clients within a week.

Let's go.

1. The Peddler on the Commuter Train

Let's sort out what exactly Ray Kroc did and why it didn't work.

I show this clip to salespeople and ask: what was that? What did we just see?

— A presentation, — they answer.

— Correct, a presentation. And how did it end?

— In failure.

— Why? The presentation was excellent.

And here the most interesting part begins. One salesperson, Andrey, put it like this: the need wasn't uncovered, the pain point wasn't uncovered. The diner owner he was presenting the mixer to didn't need production growth. His pain is somewhere else, and that pain wasn't opened up — so everything sailed past.

And Dmitry added a thought more precise still: or maybe he did need it — but didn't yet know it himself.

Memorize both formulations; we'll be returning to them all book long. For now, let me give my own definition of what Ray Kroc was doing. He worked like a peddler on a commuter train. You know those guys? A man walks through the train car telling everyone at once about his goods: «A unique flashlight, runs on a single battery, indispensable around the house...» He doesn't ask who needs a flashlight. He broadcasts. And what conversion does he get? Right — miserable. One in a hundred. Because a monologue is a lottery: get lucky and stumble on someone whose need has already ripened — there's a sale. No luck — «thanks anyway.»

In fairness: Ray Kroc had no chance to do otherwise. When he was hauling his mixers around, SPIN didn't exist yet. Neil Rackham hadn't yet run his research. Kroc acted as he knew how — like a peddler on a train. But that excuse no longer works for you. You're holding this book.

Now an assignment. Don't read on until you've done it. Imagine you are Ray Kroc. You're standing in that very diner with the five-spindle mixer, and before you is the owner with his ancient one-shake machine. You understand that selling head-on won't work — you've just seen how that ends. How would you steer the conversation? Formulate your first two or three phrases right now. Not «I roughly know what I'd talk about» — specific phrases. Write them down.

Written them? Now compare with how my students played it out. I took the role of the diner owner: I'm that fellow, the owner of the little restaurant. Sell to me.

Sergey found his footing first:

— How many milkshakes do you sell a day?

— Two hundred cups, — I answer.

— And when are your peak hours?

— Twelve to two.

— How long does one shake take to make?

— About a minute and a half.

Feel what's happening? We haven't sold anything yet. But the atmosphere is already different: not a huckster broadcasting at the counter, but two people talking about the business of one of them. Then Galina joined in:

— And how many servings does your machine make at a time?

— One. There's one spindle in it.

— So in peak hours you make, say, seventy-five servings. Would you like to be making a hundred?

— I would...

And in that second — mark it — the client for the first time said «I want» himself. Not the salesperson telling him «you need this,» but the client saying «I would like.» Those are fundamentally different universes.

And then Zhenya asked a question that made me, playing the diner owner, genuinely shudder:
— Tell me, what happens to your sales if your only mixer breaks down?

— I... don't know. I hadn't thought about it. That actually scared me a little.

There it is. That moment is what the entire technology this book is devoted to exists for. The salesperson hasn't said a word about his product — and the client already feels uneasy living without it.

But I must tell the sequel too, because it's instructive. Riding the wave of success, one of the salespeople immediately blurted out:

— So maybe we should replace your mixer with the five-spindle one? If one spindle breaks — four keep working!

And that was that. We were going so well — and fell off. I tell him: stop, stop. You've started pushing. Too early. I, the diner owner, have only just begun to understand that you didn't walk in here for nothing — and you're already dragging me to the register. An early solution kills a sale as reliably as a monologue does.

Remember: a monologue doesn't sell. A dialogue sells. The master's task is to steer the conversation so that the client himself says: «All right, show me what you've brought already.»

You can push head-on: «you need this, you need this.» Or you can ask a few questions — and the person will ask for the presentation himself. I've seen it many times: a client who has been talked with correctly interrupts the salesperson: «Hold on, wait — how does your material actually install? Tell me more.» He already needs it — before you started presenting. That is the result of the stage this book is devoted to.

CHECK YOURSELF

— What is Ray Kroc's main mistake, described in one phrase — not «a bad presentation,» but more precisely?

— What changed in the conversation with the diner owner when the salespeople switched from statements to questions — how did the client's state change?

— With what action did a salesperson nearly destroy the conversation at its best moment, and why is that dangerous?

PRACTICE

Recall your last deal that didn't happen. Honestly reconstruct the first five minutes of the conversation: how many sentences did you utter, and how many did the client? Count literally. If the score is 20:3 in your favor — congratulations, you've found your inner commuter-train peddler. Write that score in the margin — repeat the measurement at the end of the book.

2. What You're Fighting For: Point A and Point B

Before going further into the technology, let's make a short stop. It may look like a lyrical digression, but it is in fact the foundation. Without it, everything else is just interesting information that will be forgotten within a week.

First, a clarifying question: does your personal income depend on the results of your sales? If yes — read on attentively. If you somehow answered «no» — over the years of my practice I've run into such cases a couple of times, and each time I thought: how does one even work with that... But I hope everything is fine in your case and the link exists.

Now take a sheet of paper. Not «picture a sheet of paper» — take one. This is the first of the book's many places where the entire difference in results lies between «read it» and «did it.»

First. Write a number: how much you earn, on average, per month today. Show no one; it's yours.

Second. Write how much you would like to be earning after three months of conscious, purposeful work on your selling. Realistic, but ambitious.

Third. Subtract the first from the second. That difference is what you're fighting for. For one person it's eighty thousand, for another one hundred fifty, for a third two hundred thirty. The number is yours, and any number is the right one.

Fourth. Multiply the difference by twelve. Imagine: you reached the new income dynamic and held it for a year. That is how much money appeared in your life additionally. A million and a half? Two? Look at that number. Do you need it?

And fifth, the most interesting. Write five answers to the question: what do you need this money for? What will you allow yourself, what will you buy, what will you get rid of? You have a minute. Five ideas.

When I give this exercise to salespeople, the mortgage always surfaces first. And I always ask: come on — besides the mortgage. A mortgage is a thing that can accompany a person all his life: closed one, opened another. It's a strong motivational kick, I agree, but it doesn't ignite. Look for what ignites. One person wrote: finish building the banya, change the car, a vacation. Another — the daughter's education, a renovation, living without debts. And one simply wrote «a dream.» I ask: what dream? Maybe your dream is to eat an ice cream — you don't need to plow for a whole year for that; go buy an ice cream. A dream without specifics is not a goal; it's a caption on a postcard.

Speaking of specifics. Oleg, one of my students, wrote: a boat with a motor. And here I couldn't hold back, because I'd found a kindred spirit: I myself had an inflatable boat with a nine-point-nine motor for five years, and recently I got myself a sixty-horsepower cabin boat and passed the license exam. And let me tell you: passing the boating license is a feat in its own right — a thousand questions with absolutely no bearing on real life; my brain nearly exploded; I passed the theory on the second try and the practical on the third. But here's my point. I don't judge your goals — they're your goals. I judge the specifics. If I see «a boat with a motor, twenty-five horsepower» — I see there's energy in it. There's a reason to get up in the morning and sell.

And now the most important question of this block. I advise you to hang it on the fridge, on the monitor, or as your phone wallpaper — I'm barely joking. The question is: **how** am I going to increase my income? Not «by how much» — you've already written that. But — how? What specifically will you do differently?

I put this question to salespeople and watch the same picture every time. People write: «develop myself,» «sell more to earn more,» «level myself up.» I ask Artyom: what does «developing yourself» mean? Will you do more push-ups? Take up running? That's not a goal; that's intellectual chewing gum. Understand this: a goal is the brain's order to the body. If you order the body an abstraction

— «develop,» «sell more» — the body shrugs and goes on doing anything at all except selling. The body executes only concrete orders.

What does a concrete order look like? Oleg — the one with the boat — formulated: visit the developers by the end of the month. I say: the word «all» sounds exactly as unspecific as «none.» How many? He thought: seven. Now that's a goal. Visit seven specific clients, work through each one's needs with the technology you'll master in this book, and give each one a presentation. A goal like that can be completed in a month, and it is guaranteed to move your sales. And I recommend you set yourself the same one right now: an N number of clients on whom you will run SPIN as you read this book. We'll read — and train on them.

Remember: a goal is the brain's order to the body. The body does not execute an abstract order. «Develop myself» is not a goal. «Hold seven SPIN meetings by the end of the month» is a goal.

CHECK YOURSELF

— What difference did you get between point A and point B — and what does that number, multiplied by twelve, mean to you?

— Why doesn't the formulation «I'll sell more to earn more» work as a goal?

— How does your personal answer to «how am I going to increase my income» sound — in the format of a concrete order to the body?

PRACTICE

Choose a number — how many clients you will work through with SPIN while reading this book. Five? Seven? Write that number next to the sum from the exercise. These two numbers are now linked.

3. Loader or Salesperson?

Now an exercise I give every salesperson — and every time it exposes something people haven't thought about for years.

In any business, in any product group, in any line of services, there are two categories of what you work with. The first — what people **buy** from you. The market wants it on its own. You don't have to sell it — it gets asked for, people come for it, they take it. The second — what you **sell**. The client doesn't wake up in the morning thinking about it. He has to be convinced of it; you have to strain for it.

Take a sheet and draw up two lists for your product. On the left — what people buy from you. On the right — what you have to sell. I'll give a hint on how to think, using the example of the construction-materials salespeople I worked with — their product is insulation.

When I first gave them this assignment, they started listing SKUs: people buy this board, and we have to sell this membrane and this adhesive foam. A fine start, but I asked them to dig deeper: which **characteristics** get bought, and which have to be sold? And here it got interesting. What gets bought — the name. The brand everyone knows; nothing needs explaining. Proven quality gets bought. Habit gets bought — «we've always taken it, we'll take it now.» And what has to be sold? One of them, Sergey, raised a subject I'm grateful to him for to this day: on the market, his material has become a household word, and that word is used for all similar products, including outright garage-made ones. So what has to be sold is the uniqueness of the real product versus the counterfeit. Novelties the market doesn't know yet have to be sold. And — attention — the price has to be sold. Because the real thing cannot cost the same as the garage-made thing.

Let's stop here, because this is fundamental. SPIN is not for everything in a row. SPIN is for the right column of your list. For what doesn't sell itself. For expensive products, expensive packages, expensive solutions. The left column sells without you.

And from here — a division I want to settle in your head forever. Two sub-personalities live in each of us: the loader and the salesperson. From the loader, people buy. He ships. The salesperson sells. He convinces, shapes the need, changes minds.

And now an uncomfortable story. There are managers who have worked in sales fifteen or twenty years. The man got lucky — or unlucky, depending on how you look at it: he sells a product everyone needs, there's a line for it, he works in a shortage economy — this one gets some, that one doesn't. And so for twenty years. How does he see himself? «I'm a super-salesman. Twenty years in the field. Heaps of clients.» In reality he is a first-rate loader. He may never once in his life have sold. Never fought an objection. Never gone in cold to a client who's doing fine and works with a competitor at a lower price. Never once changed a person's mind. All his life — he shipped.

Tell yourself honestly, only yourself: what percentage of your result is made by your inner loader, and what by the salesperson? Rate from one to ten how much this is about you. It's not a verdict — it's diagnostics. The loader in you is needed; he has his own work: there are clients and goods that genuinely don't need selling — they just need shipping on time and without screw-ups. But there is the other part of the work. The salesperson is a hunter, a tiger walking his territory: he finds a new client, or sells twice as much to an old one, or sells at a higher price, or gets every novelty onto the shelf. That is his prey. And it is for him that this book is written.

Remember: from the loader, people buy — the salesperson sells. SPIN is for the salesperson: for expensive products, novelties, and everything that doesn't sell itself.

CHECK YOURSELF

- What ended up on your «they buy from me» list, and what on the «I have to sell» list?
- Why do twenty years of tenure in sales say nothing about whether a person can sell?

— In which situations of your work is loader mode appropriate, and in which are you losing money by staying in it?

PRACTICE

Take your right-hand list — «what I have to sell» — and circle the one item on it that carries the most money for you. That is the item on which you will drill every tool of this chapter and the next ones. It is your prey for the coming month.

4. Where SPIN Lives: The Five Stages of a Sale

Before dissecting the technology, let's put it in its place — in the literal sense. Any sale, whatever you deal in, passes through five stages. Test yourself: can you name them from memory? Write them down without peeking.

Now let's check. Stage one — establishing contact. Note, not «the greeting» — a greeting is merely one element of contact, and you can't name a whole stage after it. Stage two — needs discovery. But I ask that one more word be added to that name, and when I ask salespeople which word must be added for it to sound true, someone always guesses: shaping. Discovering and shaping needs. Feel the difference: you can discover what already exists. To shape means to create a need where the client hasn't yet become aware of it. Remember Dmitry's line about the diner owner: «maybe he did need it, but didn't know it yet»? That's it. Stage three — the presentation. Four — handling objections: we don't want it, but we have to. Five — closing the deal.

So then: SPIN is the tool of the second stage. Its heart. Part of SPIN also works on establishing contact — you'll see later how questions bring people closer — but its main work is here: to discover and to shape the need. The second book of this series will be devoted to the presentation, the third to objections. Everything in its place. For now, absorb the order: first SPIN — then the presentation. Ray Kroc did it the other way around, and you saw the result.

And one more fundamental principle before we move on. People buy anything for two reasons: because they want to gain something — that's the positive purchase, the purchase of a dream. And because they want to avoid something — that's the purchase from pain. A question for you: which purchase happens faster — from a dream or from pain?

Many salespeople answer: from a dream — a dream attracts, after all. Now recall yourself. A dream can be postponed — by a month, a year, until retirement. We dream professionally and at great length; at that discipline we're all masters of sport. But pain is here and now. A tooth aches — you go to the dentist today, not «plan it for next quarter.» All fast sales are made from pain. Therefore the salesperson must know how to create the «from pain» state in negotiations — even where no pain was originally presumed. Then deals close faster.

Remember: fast sales are made from pain. A dream the client is prepared to postpone for years — pain demands a solution now.

CHECK YOURSELF

— What are the five stages of a sale called, and why can't the second stage be called simply «needs discovery»?

— At which stage does SPIN work, and what must happen before you open the presentation?

— Why does a purchase from pain happen faster than a purchase from a dream — explain with an example from your own life?

PRACTICE

Recall your last three purchases costing more than a month's salary — personal ones, not work ones. Next to each, write: was it a purchase from a dream or from pain? What actually pushed you? This small self-analysis will teach you to see the mechanism from the inside.

5. Need and Problem: Learning to See Underwater

Now — the distinction without which SPIN doesn't work. Take two words salespeople usually dump into one pile: need and problem. What's the difference? Think, formulate it in your own words, before reading on.

I'll give my definition through a picture. Here stands a house, and the house has a cold wall. You and I are looking at one and the same fact. This wall needs insulation — that is the need. And in this same wall, while there's no insulation, lives a problem: every winter the owner overpays for heating. One fact — two dimensions. The need is «what I require.» The problem is «what hurts me while I don't have it.»

Why is this so important? Because the client talks to you in the language of needs — and buys in the language of problems. Listen closely to what clients tell you. They speak positively: «Bring me insulation.» «I need a batch by Friday.» «We want a material that installs simply, without a highly skilled crew.» «Ship in small batches.» It sounds brisk, businesslike. Nobody calls you saying: «Hello, my life is a complete ambush.» But behind each of these brisk phrases hides somebody's pain, and our work is to see it before the client himself does.

Let's train. I name a need — you, before reading the answer, name the problem hiding behind it.

A dealer client says: I need a batch of insulation, and fast. What hurts him? The salespeople answer quickly: he's losing customers. Exactly. Right now, while the goods aren't in his warehouse, buyers turn around and walk to the neighbor. He doesn't «want insulation» — he is bleeding money.

A site foreman says: I need to finish the project on schedule. What pain is under that phrase? One of my students, Yulia, unpacked it instantly: miss the deadline — get hit with the penalty. Let's add: he loses money on this project, loses the next projects from this customer, loses reputation. One phrase — three stories of pain.

A customer says: we want a material that goes down easily, without a complicated wet screed. Where's the pain? Here's where: wet works can't be done in winter. He'll have to wait for spring. By spring the roof will leak, and the interior finish will be ruined. The schedule stalls — and stopping a construction site is very expensive. Plus a low-skill crew will botch a complicated technology.

A store says: ship in small batches. The pain? He has nowhere to store. Bring him a full truck — he'll lose track of it, have it pilfered, freeze his money in it.

Feel your vision changing? That is the core skill of this section: behind every need, even the sweetest dream, hides a problem. And my task as a salesperson is to learn to work on the territory of problems.

But here one important caveat is needed, and almost everyone trips on it. Problems come in two sorts: those that help sell and those that hinder selling. Here's how it looks live. I ask salespeople: what problem does your client have? Someone answers: our material is expensive for him. Stop. Is that a problem? It's a problem. Does it help us? No — it drags us off into objection handling. It is a problem that hinders buying. Or: the client doesn't understand how to work with our new product. For a minute I argued with the salesperson who proposed it, until I understood that he was right and I was wrong: the client doesn't know — and we do. We can solve this problem. So it's a helping one. I concede that defeat with pleasure — it produced a rule: we need the problems the client has **without** our product. Not problems with our material — problems without it. The roof leaks. The warehouse freezes. Buyers walk away. Deadlines burn. That is our territory.

Remember: the client speaks the language of needs and buys in the language of problems. Look for the problems the client has without your product — those are the problems that help sell.

CHECK YOURSELF

— How does a need differ from a problem — show the difference with an example from your business?

— Why is the client's phrase «you're expensive» a problem that hinders selling, and where does it drag the negotiation?

— What three typical problems do your clients have before meeting you, in the course of working, and after the purchase?

PRACTICE

Divide a sheet into two columns. On the left, write out the five typical need-phrases you hear from clients most often — in their exact words. On the right, opposite each, write the problem hiding behind it: what the person is losing, what he risks, what he overpays for while the need stays unclosed. This little table is a blank for the homework at the end of the chapter — don't lose it.

6. The Salesperson's Weapon: Strong Questions

So, we've established: the work must happen on the territory of problems. With what instrument? When I put this question to salespeople, they answer in chorus: questions. Of course. But here's the trouble: everyone knows the word «questions,» and only a handful command the instrument. We're about to fix that — and we'll start with a game.

I've thought of a word. Your task is to find out which. You may ask questions, but with restrictions: you can't ask what the word is, how many letters it has, or which ones. And the main wish: the more questions you ask, the worse. The goal is not to bury me in questions but to ask a few accurate ones. And you have only three attempts to name the word: name it wrong — lose a life.

Let's play it out along the lines of a real match with my students. The first question they asked me was: what field is the word from? I answer: it's from the world of machinery — cars, motorcycles. The second question — and note how good it is: tell us, what do you need it for, where do you use it? I answer: this thing holds air back. In the wheel of a car, a motorcycle, a bicycle — while riding and while parked. Third question: what does it look like? From above — round. From the side — several little cylinders of different widths stacked on one another. And the fourth question, after which everything became clear: what happens if this thing fails?

The tire goes flat.

And instantly the answer sounded: the valve stem. Yes. Four questions — and a word impossible to guess by brute force is opened up like a tin can.

And now — why we played. Out of this simple game grow three lessons on which all the further technology stands.

Lesson one: stupid questions exist. Whatever anyone says about «there are no stupid questions» — in sales there are, and how. «Is it alive — not alive? Edible — inedible?» — the standard rubbish people usually bury this game under. Ask an empty question — get an empty, uninformative answer. This works in negotiations too: the quality of the client's answers equals the quality of your questions.

Lesson two: you must listen, not guess. In that match one player couldn't hold back after all: I said «this thing doesn't clean the air, it holds it back,» and a second later he blurted out — «the cabin filter!» I had just said: doesn't clean. Minus one attempt. Write down a term — I coined it for exactly this: the fantasy about the client. It's when I've composed in advance what the client thinks, and I no longer care what he actually says. A salesperson with a fantasy about the client doesn't listen — he waits for a pause to insert his prepared piece. The client feels it with his skin.

Lesson three, the main one: if weak questions exist — then strong ones exist too. Questions with which I influence the other person, move him toward a decision. Did you notice what the question «what happens if this thing fails?» did to the game? It instantly cracked open the essence of the object. Memorize its form — in a few pages you will recognize in it the king of the entire technology.

Now let's take questions apart by their construction, the way a gunsmith takes apart a rifle.

The first level: closed and open. A well-worn topic, it would seem — but don't rush to flip ahead. I'll tell a story against self-assurance — my own. For many years I studied open and closed questions, considered myself a specialist, and trained hundreds of people in this. And then one day I went to study myself — a long coaching program. First module, the trainer calls me up: go on, ask your partner questions. I ask. The trainer says: Alexey, those are closed questions. I was stunned: come on, that can't be, I'm a master of open questions, I was training people in this before you opened your coaching school! He calmly repeats: Alexey, those are closed questions. And then it hit me — the very thing I'm telling you this story for: knowing that open questions exist does not make you a master of asking them. Between «I know» and «I do» lies an abyss, and the bridge across it is called training.

So let's train. Technically it's simple. A closed question presupposes a «yes» or «no» answer, and the stress in it always falls on the verb: do you LIKE coffee? do you HAVE children? did you

SELL today? An open question begins with the words who, what, where, when, how, why — attach any of them to the same phrase and it swings open: what kind of coffee do you like? how many children do you have? how did today's sales go?

An exercise — try it at speed. I give a closed question; your task is to return it open, out loud, without stopping to think. Do you have a car? — What car do you have? Did you hit last month's plan? — What numbers did you close the month with? Do you need delivery? — How would it be most convenient for you to receive the goods? Easy? Now catch the nuance: «tell me about your car» doesn't count. That's not a question, that's an appeal. It has to be a question proper.

And one more variety for completeness: the test closed question. In form it pretends to be open, but it slips in ready-made options: which tea will you have — black or green? The places of «yes and no» are taken by «black and green»; the essence is the same. Test questions can be useful in negotiations; every type of question has its place and time. But right now I want to focus you on something else — on what almost nobody talks about.

Open questions come in weak and strong. And this is already the masters' territory.

I'll explain not with a definition but with a sensation — the way it happens live. I ask my students: ask me any open questions, and we'll listen closely — is it weak or strong? They ask: what time do you wake up? Feel it — weak. Why? I know the answer by heart; I don't need to think: six thirty, next. They ask: what motivated you to take up training people? Oh, that's moving toward strength — here I'll have to dig into myself. And then one of them noticed the plant behind my back and asked: what energy do you get from that plant? And I froze. No idea! I had to search for an answer that wasn't in me — to create it right there in the conversation.

There's the whole difference for you. A weak question is about facts a person recalls easily. A strong question is one that cannot be answered from memory. Answering it, the person thinks, hunts for hidden meanings, creates something new. And now the main consequence for sales: while the client answers from memory — you are not influencing him. Influence begins where his thinking begins.

Let's land it on money. Take the question salespeople ask most often and which, frankly, I'm not fond of: what's your budget? A weak question, a questionnaire question. The client names a figure — and what has changed? Nothing. Once I proposed that my students strengthen it, and we climbed the whole ladder live. First attempt: are you prepared to spend on a quality product? Rejected — that one's outright closed. Second: how much are you prepared to spend? Open now, but still weak — the answer lies ready-made in the client's pocket. Third, from Olga: and where does this budget of yours come from? Oh, warmer — the client has to explain the workings of his money. And finally someone formulated: and how could we expand your budget? Stop — there it is. In what way could you and we together increase your purchasing budget? The client cannot recall the answer to such a question — the answer doesn't exist. He is forced to create it: to think about reserves, about a credit line, about deferred payment, about reallocation. Hear it? He is already looking for a way to buy more from you. That is what a strong question does.

And so you don't conclude that a strong question is always good, I'll gift you an anecdote from practice. We're drilling weak situation questions, and one salesperson delivers to the client: «Last week you ordered two truckloads of insulation from us. How are they feeling?» I couldn't hold it in: that question is so strong it's a brain explosion. How are the truckloads of insulation feeling?! What am I supposed to answer — they're depressed? They're in emotional ecstasy? The strength of a question must be appropriate. Sometimes you need a simple weak question about facts — and that's fine. But we will move, train, and reach in the direction of strong ones.

Remember: a strong question is one the client cannot answer from memory. He has to create the answer — which means think. Influence over the client begins where his thinking begins.

CHECK YOURSELF

— What is the «fantasy about the client,» and at what moment of a negotiation have you caught yourself in it?

— How do you turn any closed question into an open one, and on which word does the stress fall in a closed question?

— How does a strong open question differ from a weak one, and why does a strong question influence the client's decision?

PRACTICE

Take the three questions you ask clients at every meeting — your stock, habitual ones. Write them down. Now classify each: closed, open weak, or open strong? Rewrite each one a rung higher: closed into open, weak into strong. Tomorrow, ask the client the new versions and watch how the length and depth of his answers change.

7. The Dog on a Nail

Now — the strongest SPIN metaphor I've met in twenty years. We're approaching the core of the technology, so read this story slowly.

On the porch of his house sits an old man. Beside him lies his dog, softly whimpering. The old man sits all day — he's content, nowhere to go; he just sits and enjoys himself. The dog lies there and whimpers. Neighbors pass by and hear it. In the evening, coming back from the field, one can't take it anymore:

— Listen, why has your dog been whimpering all day?

— What do you mean, why, — the old man replies. — It hurts. She's lying on a nail.

— On a nail?! Then why doesn't she get up?

The old man shrugs:

— It hurts enough to whimper. But not enough to get up.

Reread that last phrase one more time. It hurts her enough to whimper, but not enough to get up. Now a question for you: who is this story about? Who is the dog?

Many salespeople answer at once: that's our client! Correct. But don't rush — the answer goes deeper. Once, an answer sounded that was more precise still: aren't we ourselves the same dog? Of course. The dog on the nail is every one of us. Tell me honestly: are there areas of your life about which you've been saying «this doesn't suit me» for years — and doing nothing? The extra weight. The smoking. Too little time with the kids. The vacation you haven't taken in three years. You complain about it to friends, colleagues, yourself — that is, you whimper. But you don't get off the nail. If we were sitting in one room, I'd ask for a show of hands — and a forest of hands would rise. It is a normal, natural human state. Which means — your client's state too.

Now watch what the client — the dog on the nail — looks like in negotiations. Take a corporate customer, a developer. He agreed to meet you. He sits across from you, drinking your coffee: «Well, tell me what you've got. New roofing materials?» You tell him: it lays down like this, here it's easy, there it's fast. He nods: «Neat. And what does it cost? Uh-huh... You see, my friend, I'm used to doing a concrete screed. Everything works fine. Everybody does it that way.»

A classic. Now let's parse it through the metaphor. Why do I say he is a dog on a nail? Where is the nail? The nail is his current technology with all its sores: wet works, winter, deadlines, crews. He lives with it. And where is the whimpering? Here's the subtle point; people almost never see it at once. Many suppose: the whimpering is his «I'm used to it, I don't want to change anything.» No. The whimpering is the fact that he agreed to meet with you at all. He let you into his office. He is listening. He asks «well, what's new out there.» Understand? If the nail didn't prick him at all, you would not be in that office. It hurts him enough to whimper — that is, to meet, to listen, to be curious. But not enough to get up — that is, to say: «Agreed. Starting with the next project I drop the screed, chase off that crew, and lay only your material.»

And here is the central question of the whole book: what must be done for the dog to get off the nail?

The variants I hear from salespeople are usually about motivation, about «showing the benefit,» about «giving a discount.» All wide of the mark. The answer is unpleasantly simple: it has to hurt her more. The dog must be pressed. But — attention, here is the whole salt of it — if you kick the dog, she will bite you. A kick in negotiations is «everything's falling apart over there!», «you're losing heaps of money, how can you not see it!» The bite is «goodbye, we don't need anything.» Therefore the dog must be petted. Petted with pressure. You pet her — and the nail goes in a little deeper, it hurts more, and she gets up on her own. And most likely won't even bite — you were petting her, after all.

Let me translate from dog language into negotiation language. To pet with pressure means, benevolently and with sincere interest in the client's life, to ask questions that make his own situation

ever less comfortable for him. Not to press with statements — to ask. So that he himself, in his own words, tells himself how it really feels to lie on that nail. And then he himself will say: «Right — tell me more about what you've brought. This is interesting.»

Remember: the client hurts enough to whimper but not enough to get up. Your work is to pet the dog with pressure: with benevolent questions, intensify the pain until the client gets off the nail himself.

CHECK YOURSELF

— What in your typical client's behavior is the «whimpering» — by what signs can you tell the nail does prick him?

— Why must you not «kick the dog» — what happens in negotiations when a salesperson presses on the pain with point-blank statements?

— What nail are you lying on yourself — and what is it that «hurts enough to whimper but not enough to get up»?

PRACTICE

Choose one real client who «whimpers»: he meets, shows interest, but doesn't buy. Describe his nail — three to five concrete discomforts of his current situation that he tolerates. Not what's bad in his life in general, but what pricks him without your product. This is the map you'll follow in the next sections.

8. Four Letters: Meet SPIN

Time to decode the abbreviation we've been circling all chapter.

A little history — it's useful. In the seventies and eighties of the last century, the researcher Neil Rackham and his team did an enormous piece of work for giants of the Xerox and IBM class who needed to grow sales. What did they do? A brilliantly simple thing: they listened. Thousands of real negotiations by real salespeople. And they recorded which questions the salespeople asked and what happened to the deal afterward. All the questions sorted into four groups — and it turned out that these groups influence the sale in completely different ways: some move the client toward the purchase, others don't move him at all. From the first letters of those four groups, SPIN was assembled: Situation, Problem, Implication, Need-payoff.

Don't be frightened by the scholarly words — I'll now give you each group as one simple formula, and you'll see you already know all of it. More than that — you've already used all of it in this chapter.

A situation question is, in essence, the question «how are things?» Any question describing the client's situation. How's business? What are you using now? What volumes? When do you need delivery? Where do we ship? Remember the first questions to the diner owner — how many cups a day, which are the peak hours? That's them, the situation questions.

A problem question — the formula «what problems?» What doesn't suit you? What worries, hinders, concerns you — within the situation we're discussing? Just hold the focus: not «what problems do you have in life generally» — but problems with insulation, with suppliers, with the current technology. With the territory where your product lives.

The implication question — here he is, the king. The formula: «what happens if the problem isn't solved?» Recognize it? It's the valve-stem question: what happens if it fails? It's Zhenya's question about the mixer: what happens to your sales if the only machine breaks down? A question about consequences, about the price of inaction.

And the need-payoff question — the same king, only with a plus sign: «what happens when we solve the problem?» What will change, what will appear, what will become possible.

Four formulas in total; repeat them out loud: how are things? — what problems? — what happens if we don't solve it? — what happens when we solve it? That is all of SPIN at the skeleton level. Further in the book we'll build muscle onto this skeleton, but the skeleton — here it is, four questions.

Now the most valuable part of Rackham's research — the part corporations paid millions for. Which of the four groups influence the sale, and which don't? Estimate for yourself before reading. Rank the four groups by strength of influence.

Ready? Situation questions do not influence the sale. At all. No matter how many you ask. This is unpleasant news, because ninety percent of the average salesperson's conversations consist precisely of them: what's the budget, when to deliver, how much you need, how you pay. Understand me correctly — you do have to ask them; without them you can't grasp the client's picture of the world. But don't flatter yourself: while you're asking «how much and when,» you're not selling, you're filling out a questionnaire. A normal client could just as well send you those answers in a file — and nothing would change. Such questions do not make you special to the client. There are valuable exceptions — situation questions that do influence the sale exist; I've collected them over years and will share them in chapter three — but on the whole the rule is hard: situation questions don't sell.

Problem questions influence — but weakly. Surprised? Then recall the dog. A conversation about problems — what is that in our metaphor? It's a conversation about the nail and about the whimpering. «Do you get delivery delays?» — «Sure, we do.» — «And defects turn up?» — «They turn up; a cracked pack arrives — so what?» Hear that «so what»? He is used to his problems. He's

lived with them for years; they prick him, he whimpers — but whimpering doesn't mean getting up. A problem question finds the nail but doesn't intensify the pain.

And the strongest influence on the sale belongs to implication questions. «What happens if the problem isn't solved?» This is where the dog gets petted with pressure. This is where the client for the first time sets his familiar little problem next to its full price — and becomes genuinely uncomfortable. Implication questions will get the whole of chapter two to themselves; they are a separate art. For now, just fix the hierarchy: situation — zero influence, problem — weak, implication — maximal, need-payoff — consolidating.

Remember: SPIN is four formulas. How are things? What problems? What happens if we don't solve it? What happens when we solve it? Situation questions don't sell. Implication questions sell.

CHECK YOURSELF

— How do the summary formulas of all four SPIN question groups sound — from memory, out loud?

— Why do situation questions, which make up most negotiations, not influence the sale?

— In the dog-on-a-nail metaphor, what does a problem question do, and what does an implication question do?

PRACTICE

Return to the client from the previous practice — the one whose nail you described. Formulate two questions of each type for him: two situation, two problem, two implication, two need-payoff. Eight in all. Write them in his words, about his business — not in the abstract. A draft, clumsy — fine. The main thing is in writing.

9. A Session With the Psychologist: Test SPIN on Yourself

Theory's over. Now you'll test the technology on your own skin — and this is perhaps the most important exercise of the first chapter. I call it «A Session With the Psychologist,» and after it people always wear one and the same expression. Which one — you'll find out when you do it.

The essence is this. Two people work: the psychologist and the client. The psychologist's task is elementary: read the questions off the sheet. No improvising, no cleverness, no elaborate sympathizing — just read, word for word. Here is the psychologist's script; all of it fits in a palm:

How are things? What would you like to talk about?

What problem is worrying you? (And one clarification: more specifically — what exactly doesn't suit you?)

What happens if this problem isn't solved? — and this question must be asked three times in a row. The person answered — you: and what else happens if it's not solved? Answered — you again: and what else? Three passes; this is fundamental.

What happens when you solve this problem?

And the finale: if a solution existed — are you ready to get acquainted with it and use it?

That's all. The psychologist says nothing more. The client's task is different: come with a real small problem. Real — not invented. Small — this matters: it's time to change the oil in the car and I never get around to driving over; I want to drop a couple of kilos; I keep meaning to change the tires; I can't make myself clear out the garage. Don't come to the psychologist with a divorce or a depression — he won't have time to help you; his script runs six minutes. Then you switch roles.

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