

They're Just Not That Into You!

By Tom Stanfill, Founding Partner and CEO

Your prospects are not telling you the truth. It's not that they are really lying to you, it's just that they are not telling you the whole story. Is that their fault or yours? It's yours. In this economy our biggest challenge as sales consultants may be getting to the truth and finding the real opportunities. Let me illustrate.

Recently a friend called to ask me about my interest in partnering with him to buy a house in a very expensive development near the beach. Here's the *reality* (a key word) – although I would love to buy a lot in this development, I have absolutely zero ability to pull that off right now. But here's what I said, "Jim that sounds great. I've always loved that development. Why don't you look further into it and see what you find. Do you think we could get a deal?" Why would I say that if I had zero ability to invest in a vacation home? For the same three reasons your prospects act interested in your solution when they have little or no ability to fund it:



- **Pride.** Pride keeps me from being honest about my actual resources or, in the case of your prospects, their power to access the resources or influence people in the organization
- **Conflict avoidant.** It's just easier to go along with the conversation than to deal with any potential conflict that may arise by telling the truth
- **Sincere desire for the offer.** I really would like to buy a vacation home. So, just like your prospects, my desire for the vacation was more enjoyable to discuss than focusing on the likelihood of funding it.

There is only one reason the prospect would be completely candid – to help you. And it's just not that common to bump into a prospect whose focus is to make sure you don't waste your time. The bottom line is, regardless of the reason, we do not have the luxury of operating on half-truths. If my friend Jim had asked a couple of simple questions, he would have quickly learned I was not going to invest in the beach home.

Does this sound familiar? Are you having a lot of conversations with your prospects, but not seeing the opportunity to move forward? Why do we do this? Because, like Jim, we tend to focus on what we want to hear (this deal is huge, she loves us) vs. *focusing on why it wouldn't work*. In Jim's case he lost a few hours talking to a friend, but in your case you may lose your job or thousands of dollars in commission.

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In sales, our only resource is time and where you choose to invest it will ultimately determine your success. So wasting time chasing a deal is just not an option. Too many decision-makers are interested in what you have to say because they do have a desire for your solution (or the desire to know more), but they just don't have resources. I'm not saying to be negative, but just be strategic. Believe the best about people and the future, but be shrewd. Determining who can act now and who can't is paramount to surviving in sales.

So How Do You Know if They're Just Not That Into You?

Here are some simple signs to watch for:

- If they don't ask tough questions to try and determine why you vs. the competition...or to resolve concerns they may have about your solution, they're just not that into you.
- Either they have a budget or they don't. If they won't share that fact and the process to getting funding, they're just not that into you.
- If they don't have a good answer for the question: "If you didn't invest in _____, what would happen?"...they're just not that into you.

The Application

If you've been in sales a while you know it's not that simple, we always have to balance qualifying (self-centered) without sacrificing the relationship. Here are some keys to help you get at the truth:

- Encourage them to talk about what is on their agenda vs. framing the conversation around what you offer. If your solution is not on the list or low on the list, the opportunity is not very qualified.
- Focus the qualifying questions at the end of the first meeting. This will allow you to first establish a good foundation of trust, credibility, and rapport by concentrating on what is most important to them, but at the same time you must know where you stand at the end of the first meeting.
- Provide an other-centered (vs. self-centered) purpose for the questions you ask. Prime the tough questions with a reason why it is in their best interest to be honest about their answer. This will take some time because you will quickly realize that most of your qualifying questions are about you.
- Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions. If it is a real decision-maker, their respect for you as a potential partner will increase. If the person is playing a charade, they may seem irritated, but just know that they most likely are trying to hide their true intentions. In other words, the decision-maker likes when you ask tough questions and someone who is wasting your time, doesn't. That being said, always assess how you have framed your questions just to ensure it is not your approach that elicited a negative response.

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- Use a scale to ensure that any relative terms are clarified. For example: “On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely will you have the resources to invest in this type of solution?” This gives you a clearer perspective of your customer’s reality and will help you fight the temptation to be overly positive about the potential opportunity.
- Lastly, appeal to their consciousness. Let them know that you just need their advice as to how to proceed (i.e., What would do if you were me?). Communicate that you are comfortable with the fact that your solution may not be a fit and you just want to make sure you don’t waste their time. This approach creates a little less formal atmosphere and encourages the prospect to be a bit more empathetic to the challenges of your role.

About Aslan

Aslan Sales Training is a global training and consulting firm that offers customized inside sales training, field sales training, and sales leadership development. For over 15 years, Aslan has helped internationally recognized brands, such as FedEx, Oracle, Xerox, GE, Apple and others, improve the performance of their sales reps and managers. Aslan recognizes that selling, managing customers, and prospecting over the phone require a unique skill set. As a result, the company has developed a total solution that includes hiring strategies, transitioning managers into coaches and leaders and improving overall performance.