The Power of Agenda Selling

REVENUE STORM®
THE BUSINESS RAINMAKERS

Understanding the Foundation of Demand

After a disappointing sales call, salespeople often look for reasons why they heard those three heartbreaking words, "I'M-NOT-INTERESTED." Most likely, it's not that your price is too high or that your offering is subpar to the competition. You were outsold. When a prospect says they're not interested, what you should be hearing is, "You didn't bring me any insight or value I don't already have." This is not a reflection on the client, your offering to them, or the company you represent. Rather, this shows you were unable to uncover and link to their personal or professional interests and motivations.

Sales traction is born the second that linkage occurs. Suddenly, you have an individual that is very interested in what you are saying and what you can do for them, not just their company. Forming that link creates memorable and captivating discussions that result in fast-moving and unstoppable sales cycles. The more intense the linkage, the more undivided the attention you will receive, the more action it will spawn, and the greater the sense of urgency.

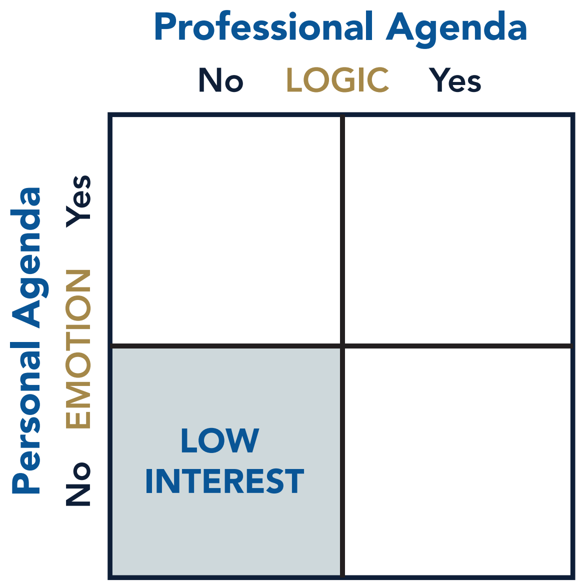
Personal and Professional Agendas

To get to the core of what drives an individual, a sales professional will need to link to the covert **personal agenda** that is driving the overt **professional agenda**. Inside of each person these two separate and distinct agendas form the emotional motivation for advancing a sales cycle. From a sales perspective, simply focus on these two agendas and getting answers to the question behind each:

- **Professional Agenda:** That which determines and defines success for an individual in their specific role or title. This is driven by business logic.
  - Agenda Question # 1: What is this person tasked with accomplishing in their role that will entitle them to either become or stay viewed as being successful?
- **Personal Agenda:** That which answers the question why success in their professional agenda is important to them. This is driven by emotional fulfillment, personal vision advancement, and the need for meaningful achievement.
  - Agenda Question # 2: What obstacles will this individual personally need to eliminate in order to either secure or advance their professional agenda? If they were to be successful, what will that success mean to them personally?

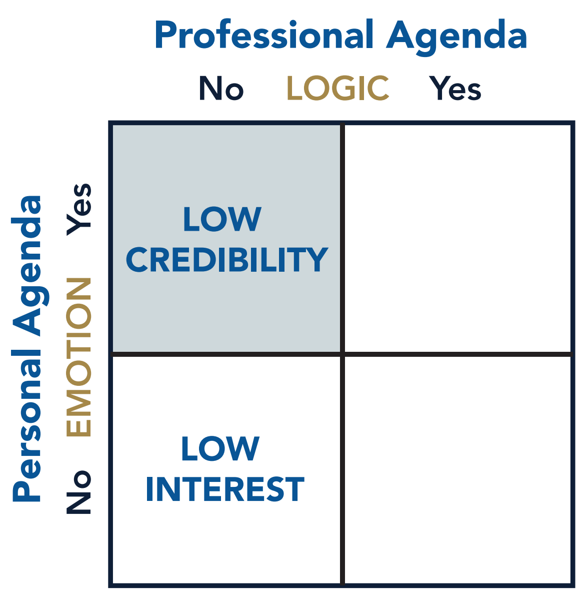
Applying the Agenda Matrix to Your Sales Contacts

To further understand both the power and consequences of agenda selling, indicate your answers to the two agenda questions by stating yes or no and finding your location on the Agenda Matrix below.



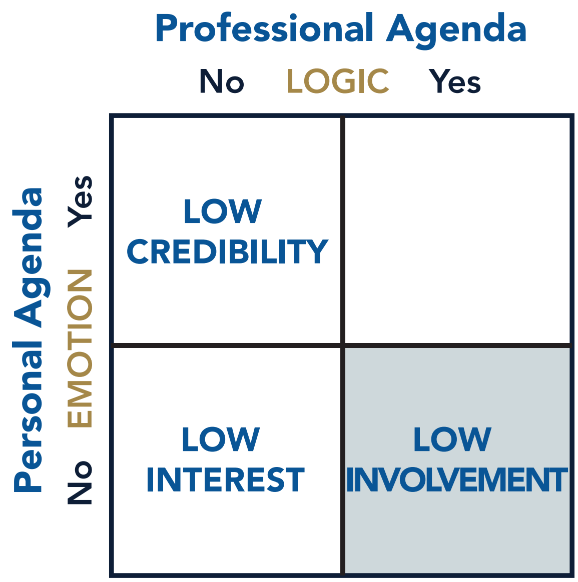
Low Interest

If you haven't uncovered or linked to either the individual's personal or professional agenda, they will have **low interest** in advancing your sales cycle. This contact is in a state of passive non-compliance and not inclined to move forward.



Low Credibility

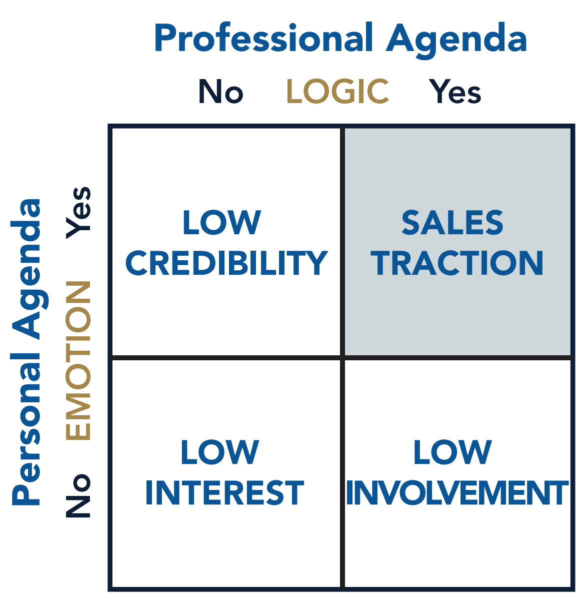
If you've only uncovered and linked to a personal agenda, the individual will be very personally motivated to assist you. However, without the logic from their professional agenda being clearly defined and articulated, they run the risk of prematurely advocating your solution without valid reason to substantiate moving forward. This could result in them having **low credibility.**



Low Involvement

If you've successfully linked to a professional agenda and shown the logic of how your offering will advance it yet haven't linked to their personal agenda, the individual may not become personally involved in advancing your sales cycle. This can be frustrating when you've just given a strong and logical value proposition. Logic, by itself, does not create enough motivation for proceeding and your contact will languish in **low involvement.**

Companies don't buy things; people in companies buy things. Until sales professionals understand this, they won't see the value of linking a professional agenda to a personal agenda.



Sales Traction

The perfect storm in selling is when you know and have linked to both an individual's personal and professional agenda. Only then does an individual have personal motivation for moving forward as well as a business justification for doing so. These two ingredients produce **sales traction.** This is when a sales cycle catches hold, demand has been created, and forward progress is now achieved.

Obtaining an Individual's Agendas

Asking High Gain Questions
(Especially good for uncovering a Professional Agenda)

If all you know is a person's company and title, you should be able to create enough compelling interest to start to a new sales pursuit through deductive reasoning alone. Compare the company's current business condition as compared to their top two or three competitors (3-year growth rate, stock values, etc.). Focus on the role of your contact and connect the dots between their responsibilities and the company's performance record. Hypothesize about what would be expected of a person in their role under current conditions. Once you've outlined several probable challenges they are most likely facing, fold your conclusions into Revenue Storm's High Gain Question format and use it to validate your hypothesis in your initial meeting with that person.

A High Gain Question has two parts: (1) lead with a statement that may be unknown or unresponded to by the customer and (2) follow up with an open-ended question using thought leadership as its core.

Example High Gain Question
"I've taken the liberty to compare your organization's performance over the last three years as compared to Company A, Company B, and Company C. It appears that out of the four companies, Company B seems to have grown in market share over Company A and C, who have slipped in market share. Your organization has stayed the same. In looking at it, it seems that Company B's R&D investment in the next generation product/service line is beginning to create significant market share results. If my conclusions are correct, it would appear that they would enjoy continued success in the immediate future while your organization is only seeing modest gains or remaining flat. If I may ask, what is your organization contemplating in this area to maintain its competitiveness?"

Asking Reveal Questions
(Especially good for uncovering a Personal Agenda)

Of all the questions, this type relies more on both art and skill. Perhaps the most famous Reveal Question is *"How does this make you feel?"* or some variation thereof. The reason it's so widely used is that it's extremely effective at uncovering issues of the heart.

In sales campaigns, client stories are all about people and how they are affected by organizational events. People want to experience the emotion and thrill of personal advancement of things very important to them. Even though some salespeople tend to cringe at this question, it has proven so useful that it continues to be a breakthrough method in relational selling.

In psychology, feelings and emotions are central to human behavior. Therapists are naturally keen to ask questions about feelings. For the same reasons, sales professionals should be equally keen to use this question type at appropriate times in a sales campaign.

When is the appropriate time in the sales cycle to use Reveal Questions? In general, when you reach a conclusion that your solution could provide business value to the prospective customer's company, it is now time to see what value it could provide to your contact. Your relationship strategy will help you determine to whom Reveal Questions should be deployed.

Keep these two pointers in mind:

- **Show empathy.** Often you will need to cover sensitive or distressing topics during the course of a sales campaign. Show compassion for the individual without getting too emotional.

- **Ask for permission before asking difficult questions.** For example, *"Is it okay to talk about...?"* This will give you important information about the relationship depth and give them permission to more comfortably navigate these conversations.

From a sales perspective, this type of question is so important when used correctly because those feelings and emotions can reveal both internal and external motivations you can then link to and use to advance the pursuit.

Example Reveal Question for Business Agenda
"If this initiative were to be seen as instrumental in elevating the performance in the field, how might that affect your department's budget next year?"
Example Reveal Question for Personal Agenda
"If your department were viewed as having thought leadership in elevating the field sales performance, and if leadership were regularly consulting with you on subjects of this nature, how would that affect your personal enjoyment of your job? I know you had a vision of what you could contribute to the organization when you took your position; how would the things we discussed advance those ambitions?"

Summary

When a sales professional can clearly articulate an individual's personal and professional agendas and link that to their solutions, they are in a position to craft a compelling value proposition that will result in the potential client being very interested in their solution. This is the origin of client demand being created.

A common myth is that you need to have a deep relationship that spans a long period of time in order to ask reveal questions and get honest answers. Realistically, the only thing required is trust in your credibility and expertise, which can be nurtured with High Gain Questions and the authenticity and transparency that comes from sharing your similar experiences and genuine empathy and compassion.

About Revenue Storm

Revenue Storm is a sales consulting firm that helps clients implement processes and disciplines to drive sustained revenue acceleration. We provide comprehensive consulting, training, coaching, and rigorous analytics to help Fortune 1000 firms create demand and increase profitable, sustainable revenues. Headquartered just outside Chicago, the firm accelerates revenues for its clients in 44 countries and nine languages. For more information and to experience the power of their approach, visit http://www.revenuestorm.com.

