

The High Cost of Making Wrong Assumptions

by
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Assumptions are judgments we hold as true without evidence or validation. Making incorrect assumptions in sales is costly. In the best case scenario, recovering from a wrong assumption may only require an investment of corrective effort, time and resources. In the worst case you could lose the entire deal. Here are five common assumptions to avoid.

- Don't assume the relationship is stronger than it is. No one would argue that a strong relationship is desirable and contributes to sales success. The problem lies in confusing being liked with being trusted. Trust, according to Stephen Covey, is a combination of character and perceived competence. Character takes time to reveal itself. Typically, likeability comes first and is the door opener but is rarely enough to clinch the deal. Rapport is stronger and is followed by bonding (emotional attachment) and ultimately, trust. Asking solid insightful questions early, plus understanding as much as possible about your prospects business, is a great way to accelerate prospect confidence and convey your competence quickly.
- If you are talking with the owner, president, or other high level executive, do not automatically assume they will make the decision. They do have the power, but the real question is, "Will they?" The last decade saw a flattening of the power structure in many organizations because of management's focus on empowerment and team building. Some executives will look at options and in the end ask for input from their subordinates. For example, a large software sale had approval from the CEO, President, and CFO. Seemingly, anyone could close this multiple hundred-thousand dollar deal. At the first demo the end users hated the software and put pressure on the executive team influencing them to cancel the order. Avoid this situation by outlining the organization's structure and identify those around your contact that have influence. Confirm your research by asking, "Mr. President, I know you can make this decision, however it is common for leaders like yourself to involve other members of their team. Who else, besides you will have input and be involved in this decision?"
- Avoid the idea of assuming you are absolutely clear on the stated need. Take any group and ask them what their biggest challenge is related to your solution. You are almost certainly going to get different answers. Everyone has a different perspective on the problem. If you fail to win a

sale, and the reason you hear was never discussed in your interviews, it is likely you did not uncover all the needs or the most important one. Take the time to interview everyone involved, and ensure that you meet the needs of the majority, not just your contact. In this way you reduce the chances of an internal adversary working against you.

- Shun thinking that cost will not be an issue, because your offering is within the stated budget. Buyers go through phases about costs and budgets. In the beginning they mask their fear of being taken advantage of or not having adequate funding to get the solution they want. After they decide, however, and usually before you know, a form of buyer's remorse may creep into their thinking. Having a budget does not mean they are willing to invest it all. Think of your own purchases. You may have the money to buy what you want, but remain unwilling at its current price. Also, your competitors may significantly drop their price to get the business or to get their foot in the door. And don't forget that if a buyer sees value in something more expensive, budgets may get adjusted upwards. Have clear discussions about the investment, your competitors potential surprise moves, and their willingness to invest fully, assuming they prefer your offering.
- Last, but not least, steer clear of assuming you understand the question being asked. For example, a prospect might ask, "Where is your organization located?" It seems simple and harmless to answer that question. But take a moment and consider all the possible reasons for that question. They could be concerned about delivery delays because of distance, or they might have concern about how much presence the company has, or wonder if decisions are made locally or somewhere else? Even though you answer their question, you might not answer the real one. Suppose your competitor uncovers the real question? Consider that the most common question at Disney World is "What time is the three o'clock parade?" Research reveals visitors really want to know "How early should I arrive, where does it start, and how long will it last?" Make sure you answer the underlying concern. A simple, "Can you explain that question?", or "You must be asking for a reason?" is all it takes.