

When Questions Are the Answers

One Question That Can Launch a Successful Sales Management Career

One of the typical challenges that top-performing salespeople who are promoted to management have when they take on a bigger job is figuring out what they need to let go of and what they need to pick up in terms of where they spend their time and attention. Scott Eblin, an executive coach and the author of *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success*, says there's a simple question that he likes to ask managers to consider as they sort this out: "What is it that only I can do?"

"The question isn't about personal indispensability," he warns. "As Charles deGaulle said, 'The cemeteries are full of indispensable men.' As special and wonderful as each of us is in our own unique ways, none of us is

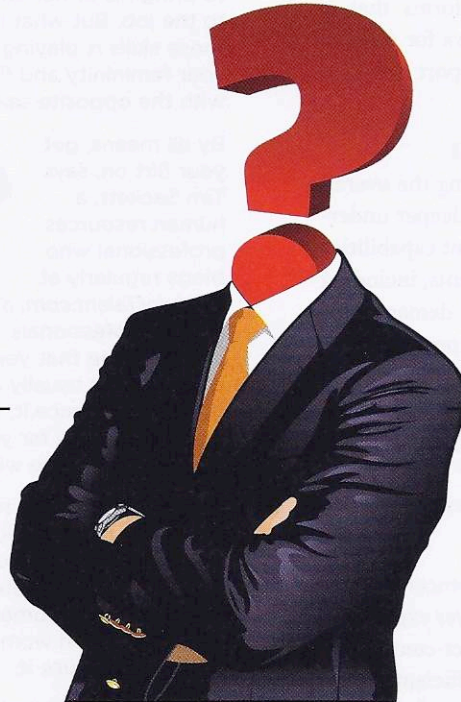
indispensable. If we get hit by a bus, it's likely that the bus is carrying someone who can step into our role."

Ouch!

It's important to ask that simple question in a slightly different way: "What is it, given the role that I'm in and the unique resources and opportunities that come with it, that only I can do?"

Eblin says there most likely is a short but very high-impact list of things that only you can do as the person filling your role. That list may include knocking down barriers for your team, securing resources, building alliances, setting goals or energizing others around a vision. Your list shouldn't include activities just because you could do them or because you're good at doing them. Those likely aren't the things that only you can do in your role. To truly serve your sales team, focus on the things that will really leverage the unique opportunities of your role and trust them to pick up some of the duties that you'll leave behind.

Eblin blogs at scotteblin.typepad.com/blog



The Question That Can Kill Any Sales Conversation

If your car engine is making funny noises and you take it in to be repaired, it would be unsettling if one of the first questions the mechanic asked was, "What's your budget?" You'd much prefer that he diagnose the problem and offer you one or more solutions along with the cost for each one.

Yet that question — "What's your budget?" — is frequently asked by business-to-business salespeople early on in discussions with prospective

buyers. Nine times out of 10, it's the wrong question, says Jill Konrath, author of *Snap Selling* and the founder of Selling To Big Companies (sellingtobigcompanies.com).

"The 'What's your budget?' question only works for planned purchases," Konrath says. "90 percent or more of the prospects you deal with on a regular basis haven't decided if they're going to change from their

status quo. They don't have money in the budget for new investments."

The better course of action is to pinpoint a need, explain possible fixes — including return on investment and/or the risk of not taking action — and provide a range of price options when they are available.

Customers will find the budget if your salespeople clearly reveal a need. But starting a conversation by asking how much a prospect has to spend may prevent them from going any further.