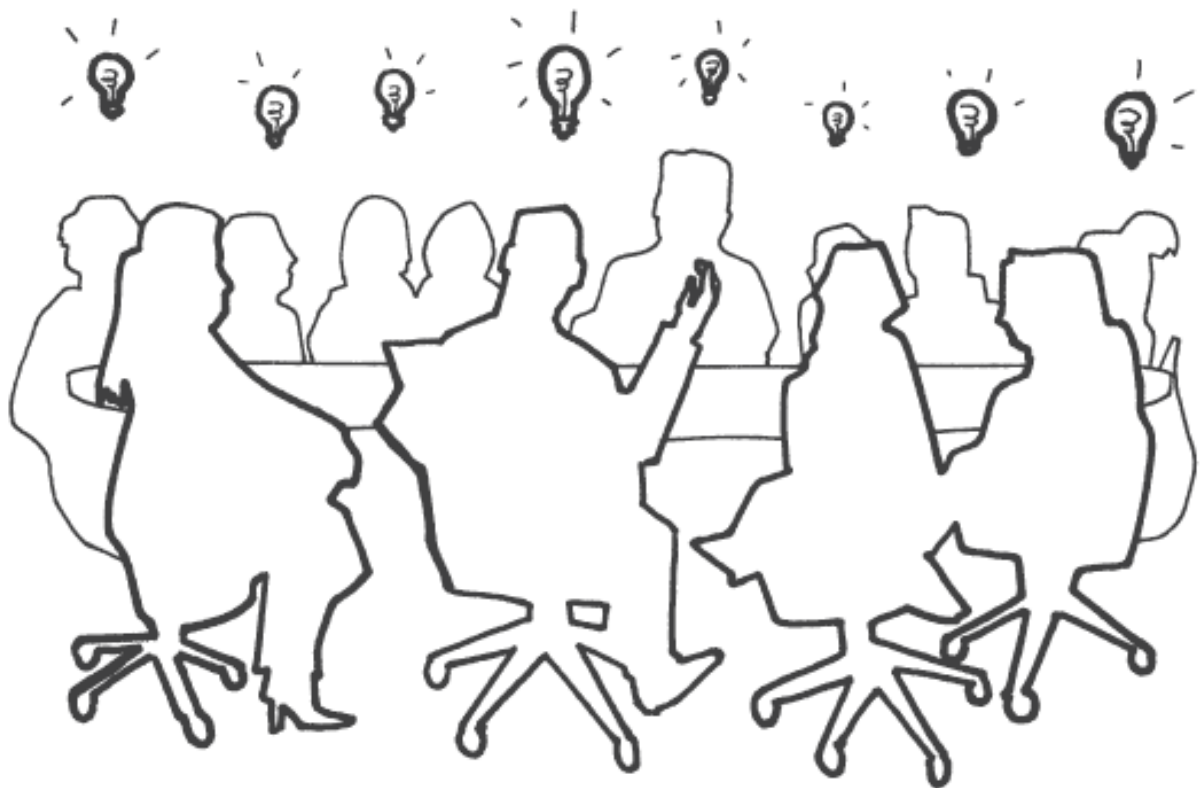


## 8 Lessons in How to Master Sales Questions

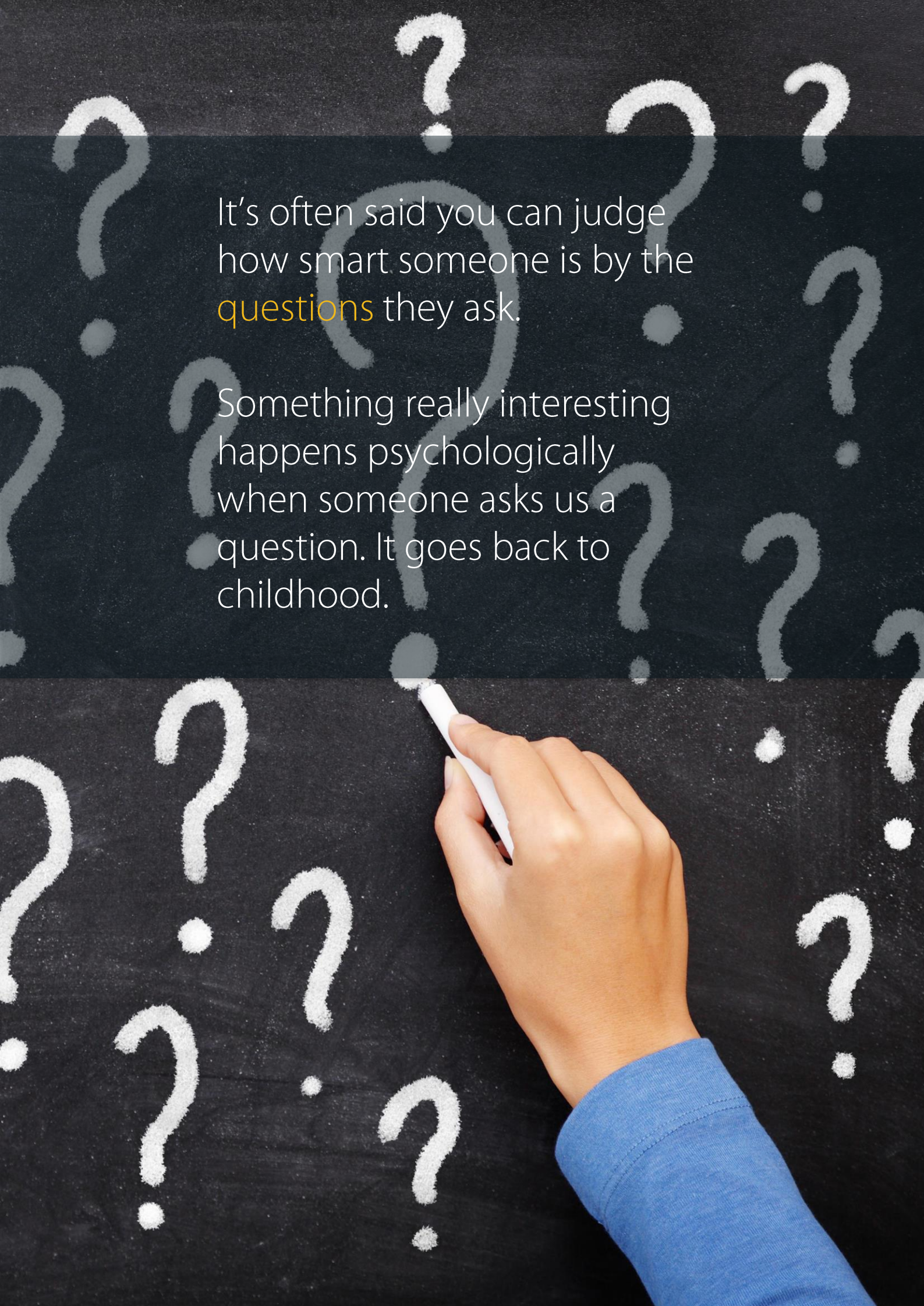
The MDs guide to using great questions to differentiate YOU in a sales call.





It's often said you can judge how smart someone is by the **questions** they ask.

Something really interesting happens psychologically when someone asks us a question. It goes back to childhood.





We automatically **believe** that the person asking the question has the answer.

Isn't that odd? Think about that. It happens to you all the time.

Someone asks you a question and you assume that they know the answer.

We learned that from school, because teachers would ask us questions, and of course teachers have all the answers.

It happens therefore in sales situations too. In sales we're typically going to ask the kind of questions that get our prospects to say: "They must know the answer to that."

So we should be thinking about how our questions can differentiate us.

Why? Because the customer is wondering; Are you the right people to work with me? Are you the right people to help my company? If you all look and sound the same, how do I know who to choose?

### **I like the questions you're asking me**

It is the conversation that I'm going to have with you that's going to give me the context and say, "Okay. These all look the same, but I like what this person is asking me. I like the questions they're asking me. I like what they're making me think about." That's the differentiator. It's not your website, it's not your ranking, it's none of that other stuff.

We need to differentiate ourselves from all of the other companies that are out there. This is what we're going to talk about when we talk about positioning.

## **The first lesson – highlight your strengths**

We need to talk about what we're bringing to the table that others are not bringing to the table. Think about that. It's hard to name a single company that is extremely talented, like it's a core competency, in every single service or product.

See, you're all good at different things.

Doesn't mean you can't do the other things, doesn't mean you're not good at the other things, but you have strengths.

Doesn't it make sense that we're going to have to ask questions that highlight our strengths rather than our weaknesses, right?

Personally I avoid wearing horizontal stripes. Right? Many of you might avoid horizontal stripes too, because it accentuates the wrong things, doesn't it? You could be doing the same thing with your business.

If you're leading with what the client wants to talk about, and what they want to talk about isn't your competency, you could be setting yourself up for a really tough road when it comes to selling to that client.

Make sure that your strengths come to the fore, and that will allow you to talk about what you're good at.

Here are some questions that allow you to bring those strengths to the core.

I want you think about this question.

"You may not have been asked this by anybody else you're talking to, but I'm just curious."

What does that question say? It's not me saying I'm better than anybody else, it's not me trashing my competitor, but by the context that I'm giving the question, what's it saying?

I'm going deeper. I care more. No one else has asked you this. I'm differentiating myself just with that question. No one else might have asked you this, but I'd like to know this. Now, it also allows you to ask a question that might be a little off centre, because you're explaining to them why it's a little bit different and it doesn't take them by surprise.

We don't want them thinking,  
"Why are they asking me that  
question? That's weird. No one  
else has asked me that."

We want them to think, "Well,  
that's a really good question. I  
wonder why no one else has  
asked me that."  
Right?

That's the way **we need** to do  
things.

A curiosity starts a change in human behavior.

Ok. So imagine this. You're at a party and you have a huge piece of spinach stuck to your teeth.

You're talking to all your friends and you go from one group of friends to another group of friends to another group of friends.

Finally, I pull you aside and say, "You might want to go to the toilets. You've got a huge piece of spinach on your teeth." What do you say? "Who are you telling me what to do?" No, You say thank you.

Thank you. Immediately, not only do you thank me for giving you that advice, but what do you now feel about all your other "friends" that just allowed you to talk? "Why didn't they tell me that?"

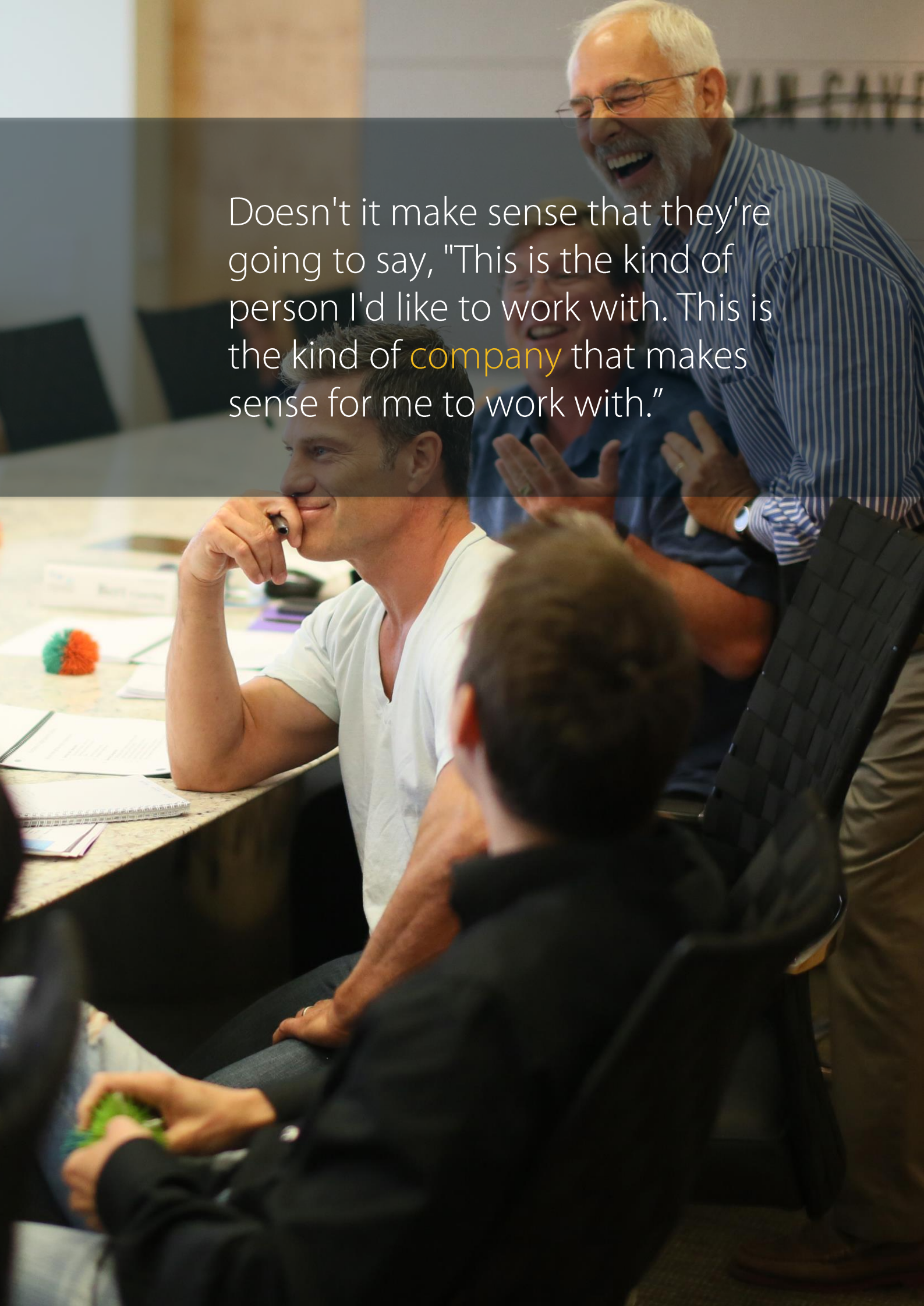
This is a question that causes your prospect to think, "Why didn't anyone else bring that up? Why isn't anybody else talking to me about that? That is important."

## **Lesson 2: Don't alienate yourself with your questions**

Something that has really come to the fore after the economic crisis is this idea of collaboration. This idea that they want to work with you, they want you to be part of their team, right? There are a lot of questions out there that don't do this.

In fact, they alienate you from their team. You probably heard some of these, right? Where you want to talk to the "ultimate decision maker" which, to be quite blunt, doesn't really exist in many companies anymore.

Even the ultimate decision maker is going to go talk to other people before they make a decision. They're going to collaborate internally. It's how companies do business. Doesn't it make sense that if you can come across and you can appear to be the person who is used to collaborating and secondly you recognise the buyer is used to collaborating.

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a man in a white t-shirt sits at a table, resting his chin on his hand and smiling. Behind him, another man in a blue shirt is laughing. In the background, an older man with glasses and a beard is also laughing. The scene is set in a modern office environment with a wooden table and various items like a small orange and green pom-pom on the table. The text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

Doesn't it make sense that they're going to say, "This is the kind of person I'd like to work with. This is the kind of **company** that makes sense for me to work with."

Think about asking your questions like this: "Typically there are some key players in the organisation that when it comes to buying <INSERT YOUR PRODUCT>, or making decisions relating to this, you're really going to count on their opinion. Tell me a little bit about those people. How would you see someone like me working with them?" Make it seem like you're counting on the idea.

We already know it's going to happen. We already know there are people they will talk to. Embrace it. Give it a big hug. I am going to work with your people.

Don't fight it. Don't resist it. I'm going to be part of the team, so tell me about the players that you already have in place. I'm guessing that part of building your business with me, you've built a great team around you. Tell me about your team.

One of the big roadblocks that you may have run into, is we've done a really good job at selling what we do to the user side of the deal. Right? That might not be enough, because what you're selling may not just affect the user.

It's can be a culture change especially if you're selling a service. If you don't have the entire company embracing a strategy, it's not going to work.

That's your ideal customer. Your ideal customer is someone who's going to get the entire culture to embrace your strategy. Make sure early on, you're involving everybody else in the organisation.

You can also describe what it's like when you work with a company. "Usually, when I'm working up with a company like yours that does what you do, here are some of the people that are key players for me to involve."

You can volunteer those names or job titles. You can talk about the people that you usually work with. Now, what if nobody else has done this? Is that good or bad?



It's good, right? It's good.

If no one else has said, "I need to involve the rest of your team, because I want to have some good results for you, and I don't want you coming back to me in 12 months and saying we wasted money."

## **Lesson 3: Get deep and get involved**

Later on, that person is going to say, "They were the only people who wanted to involve my entire team." How many of you will have a strategy meeting with the people that you're trying to help? How many of you have all the strategists at that strategy meeting.

It's kind of hard to help a company with their entire strategy if you're talking to one person, and that one person may not be informed. You might be able to help them with their strategy, but we need to understand the entire organisation.

## **Lesson 4: The ROI Question**

You're probably running into this a lot? The ROI question.

How do you answer it? How do you talk about the ROI question?

This total investment is going to cost me £100,000 over the next 10 months. Whatever the number is, how are we grappling with this idea on the return on investment? Here's my solution to this.

Don't wait for the question to happen – lead. You lead the question, because there are a lot of people who can screw up the return on investment.

"I have a business, and I want to use a new logistics solution because sales are doing great, so I hire Eddy to help me, and Eddy does a great job, gets my deliveries there on time and with a flexible service.

Oh, one thing. My warehouse picking of orders sucks. All the work Eddy does is not going to change the fact that my orders are wrong and still get the same complaints and the same level of returns."

You have clients out there who have horrible customer service, horrible sales, horrible delivery issues, who can't keep up with orders, who can't keep up with production.

Rather than waiting for them to ask you what's the ROI, put it back on them.

How prepared are you to handle growth in orders you're going to see over the next 12 months? In other words, don't worry about my job getting your deliveries done.

Are you ready for the extra work will come out of this programme? Get them focused on the things that could cause a problem. Does this question indicate that they're going to get an ROI? It does, doesn't it? Have you promised them anything?

No, but you're the guy talking about ROI. This is business terminology of what ROI would look like.

Another question.

- Tell me more about the conversations you've had with customer service.
- Tell me more about some of the conversations you've had with the sales department.
- Tell me more about how you managed to get your IT director and your technology team onboard with the changes.

What's the answer to those questions in most cases? Haven't had that conversation.

Well, you know what? Maybe it would make sense for us to have that conversation first. Does that emphasise ROI? Yes, but we're not there bragging about ROI, we're not giving them numbers or statistics. We're merely explaining. We are leading the discussion. We're not just responding to questions about ROI.

Most of us panic when that question comes up. If we can be the person to bring it up, we're in control. We're having an ROI discussion on our terms, not on their terms.

## **Lesson 5: Let's talk about value**

I told you earlier that you all look the same, right? No one likes to hear that, but you all look the same. If you all look the same, the differentiator is going to be you.

It's going to be based on the kind of conversations that they've had with you. That's what's going to determine whether or not you're bringing something extra; something that no-one else is not bringing.

When was the last time that you looked at another Eddy's website that said something like this: "We really suck at delivering on time." No, no one says that. It's not very catchy. How about this? "We're really lousy at getting ourselves organised."

See, they all say the same thing. 'Unique, innovative, on-time, reliable, quality, experience, results.'



You all use the same words. It's all the same. I'm counting on my conversation with you to help me realise that you're not all the same.

I'm looking for that special something.

Did it ever occur to you that maybe one of your potential clients is sitting on the other side of the desk or the other end of that conference line and they're thinking, "I just wish somebody would tell me what the hell I should do? I just wish somebody would talk about something different than what everybody else is talking about." Right?

Now, if you did think that your prospects were thinking that, would your conversations change? Probably?

If you could see the little bubble over their head and see what they were thinking, you would do something different. You need to become the value. You are the differentiator between you and everyone else. Look at the quality of your conversations.

I do this exercise using the sales teams, but it's a very, very cool exercise, and we can sort of do it in part today, where we make the laundry list, and I go around the room and I ask the sales people what makes a really good sales conversation. I want you to think about that. How do you know you just had a good sales conversation with one of your prospects?

Example answers you get from the exercise

We connected.

They talked a lot more.

They talked about the future.

They were strategic.

They were talking long term.

They start talking about their problems.

They shared relevant information related to problems.

If we went down that list, something very interesting would happen.

We'd come up with a list that would define what a great conversation would mean for us, when we're in that situation.

Now, you know what's very interesting about that list? Put your customer hat on and go through the list. Guess what?

They want the same things you want! They define a good conversation the same way you did. Wow, we shared a lot of relevant information. Wow, we talked about the future. Wow, we connected. There was some synergy. They really understood my problems. That's what we talked about. We were talking about results. We had next steps. It was actionable.

The same list that we would have for a good conversation would be the same list that they would have for a good conversation. Rather than just judging this by, I don't know, on a scale of one to ten, if you walk out and you say, "I had a great conversation," there's a really good chance, if you have the right criteria, that they had a good conversation too. There's a really good chance that they enjoyed that conversation as much as you did.

What should your goal be? Have great conversations.

How many of you go into a sales meeting, and think, "Okay. I've got to close them " or "I've got to make sure I understand them." Just have a good conversation.

Here's the other side of that coin, and it's probably scarier. If you walk out of a meeting and you say, "Oh it was awful." What are they saying? "Oh, that was awful." A bad conversation for you is a bad conversation for them. It goes both ways. Make it your goal to have really quality, meaningful conversations with every potential prospect.

## **Lesson 6: Get out of the “why me” conversation**

Often when you're out having conversations, you end up in the "why me?" space.

The "why me?" space is more about, "Why should I pick A over B over C" You're in this realm of competing with other companies and talking about how your services are better here, or your services are better there, and well, here's where we have more experience.

Then, you go down that road where they want a reference of someone who's their exact same industry, the exact same size, who's had 100% satisfaction over the past two and a half months with only paying a few thousand pounds.

You're think, "Wow, I don't have anyone like that. I'm finished." Right? You don't call them back. You walk away. You make something up.

What if we stopped doing that?

What if we started to differentiate ourselves not by having a "why me?" discussion, but by having a "why overall?" discussion.



This is real useful, because a lot of times what we're trying to do is get someone to talk about every aspect of him buying. Is that easy or complicated?

Complicated. Don't fool yourself. People will say, "Well, sales is easy." It's not easy. You've got to talk about a lot of elements. You've got a lot of stuff to talk about, and if you miss any one of those things, you're probably going to have a weaker case than if you had covered every one of those things.

This is what happens. They say: "I want a delivery service." You say: "Okay. Let's talk about your deliveries."

We spend the next hour talking about the delivery service. In the course of doing that, I have not talked about warehousing, I have not talked about customer service, I have not talked about labeling, I have not talked about driver training, I have not talked about how many other things? The list goes on.

Now, as a result, I see you just a delivery service, because that's all our conversation was about. Remember what we said earlier, that may not be your strength. Your strength might be somewhere else, so we just wasted an hour.

If we can take them back to the "why" discussion and build that up a little bit and say: "You know, I'm just curious, when companies come to me and they want to talk about deliveries, there's usually a conversation that's happened internally that's prompted them to say we need to fix our deliveries. Tell me about that conversation."

Now what am I going to learn from that?

All kinds of stuff.

- What the goal is.
- What they're trying to accomplish.
- The bigger problems they are trying to fix.
- Who is involved in fixing it

Rather than getting sucked into the deliveries discussion, I can say, "Okay. Great answers. Typically, if you're concerned with growth, you're probably worried about reaching the whole logistics service provision. Tell me about how you handle that?"

Bingo!

Now, when the next sales person comes in from your competitor, and the buyer says, "I want to talk to you about my deliveries," and they say, "Okay. Well, let's talk about your deliveries," they haven't talked about all those things you've talked about.

What's the difference? They don't know about those things? No. It's the discussion.

I've got them to talk about why. I've got them to go back deeper than just "I want deliveries." Why do you want a new delivery service? Why do you want to do that? Why do you want to change your logistics? What is the purpose? You have to go back.

If you are in a "why me?" conversation, here's how the decision is getting made. Ready?

It's called the Excel decision. That does not mean that you excel. It means that on an Excel spreadsheet, you are listed with the other vendors. There are rankings that they've collected, and the last column is their favourite – price.

If you all look equal on a spreadsheet, who do they go with? Lowest price. Wouldn't you? It's an Excel decision. We never look at our best in the world of Excel. That's not where we like to play. If you're showing up in Excel when people are making the decision, you're doing something wrong.

## **Lesson 7: How to introduce performance and manage expectations**

A lot of companies get into trouble by overpromising, by talking about all the great things that have been happening, and by not getting enough commitment on the other end that they're going to do their part to make these things work.

We really need to lay out what expectations look like. What does that mean?

Think of Amazon. They tell you you're going to get something in three days and you get it in two days. That's what we want to do. We don't want to play the space where we promise something in two days and they get it in three.

It **doesn't** work.





We need to make sure they're going to measure the right things. How do we introduce those topics? How do we get them thinking about the right things?

Wouldn't it be great if prospects wore a badge that tells you what kind of conversation you want to have with that person just by looking at their badge? They don't wear those badges. What are their expectations? What are the expectations that they have from working with you? If those expectations are wrong, we need to correct them.

We need to be the ones to give them the expectations, maybe saying something like this.

"The tendency is to want to measure speed and cost of deliveries initially. That's not the right thing to track. The first thing that we should be measuring is . . ." You tell them what they should be measuring. You're the expert, aren't you?

If you're the expert, you should be the person who tells them what to expect: "So here's what you can expect." Now, if you promise them that they're going to same-day deliveries, or promise them business is going to go through the roof, and in three months it isn't? Yes they're, going to be upset.

What happens if you lose the business because you won't promise those things, and then go to someone else who did promise those things, and three months comes around and those things haven't happened?

They might come back to you with a little different frame of mind, right? You don't want to deal with that kind of person anyway.

## **Lesson 8: Be careful what you talk about**

Let's talk about some potholes with this. We get these great analytics from technology and systems. If you focus on them too much during the sales process, the client is also going to focus on those things when you're working with them. How many of you have clients who are always checking stuff?

Why is that happening? Why is the graph going down? Why is that line going down? We don't want them in there, do we? I mean, it's horrible when that happens. You've got a client micromanaging you and strategy's out the window.

Take time to focus on some of the other benefits that they're going to get from working with you over the long term. Get into the human element, right? You're helping them build their business for the future.

You're helping them build a business that's going to be transferrable and it's going to be long-lasting. You're helping them develop a strategy that's forward-looking and not backward-looking. Try and talk about those kind of things, rather than getting hung up on the analytics.

You want to look at the analytics and you want to share analytics when appropriate, but try not to get them into that space, because if that's what you talk about, that's what they're going to measure you on. Try and make it a little more holistic. We have to point them in the right direction, right? Here is what success is going to look like, and to give them context around that.

Think along these lines more: "When I'm working with a client and I feel like you had success, here is what it looks like. Does that sound like success to you? Do we agree on that? If they say no, or if they're looking somewhere else, we need to have a discussion about that.

Here's another issue that a lot of you run into. One of the things that we need to do is talk to people about where they want to take their business, how we can help them, how our strategy is going to help them to achieve some of those goals.

As we explore the "why" questions, we might find that they want to grow the company by X%. We might find that they've got new competition that's taking away some of their existing clients. We might find they've got new a product they want to launch.

We might find they are opening new locations. Could be anything. Once we understand that, and once we understand where they're going, it makes putting together a strategy a lot easier. It's crystal clear.

What happens when they don't have one? What happens when they have no strategy and they are not focused? It's much harder, isn't it?

If they don't seem to be committed, you've got to question the commitment. It's okay. It's part of your job. Question the commitment.

If they're continually skeptical, that's not going to change. They're not all of a sudden going to become believers because they're writing you a

cheque every month, so challenge them. Seems like you're a little skeptical. Seems like you're more skeptical than most of the customers I work with.

Let me ask you something: "You seem a little more skeptical than most of the clients that I work with, so I'm just curious why you're so skeptical. Have you had a bad experience with? Did something happen? We need to understand where that skepticism's coming from, because otherwise, it will sabotage us.

If they refuse to change, just walk away. You can't work with someone who doesn't believe. You just can't. You'll fail.

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