WIN THE DEALS THAT MATTER

The Ultimate Guide to Sales Qualification

ALTIFY™ KNOWLEDGE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

If you're in sales, time is your most precious resource. Wouldn't you agree? Critically it is a resource that you, the salesperson, have ultimate control over.

You have a vast marketplace of opportunities, brimming with potential business-boosting deals. But how do you know which opportunities are potential winners, just waiting to bloom and grow, and which opportunities are weeds that won't lead to new revenue?

As with water in a desert, however big or small your company and team, you have limited resources. A salesperson's greatest skill is knowing how to use these resources wisely. You don't want to be watering weeds while the geraniums nearby fade and die.

When you get it right, you acquire more customers, and better quality customers, in less time. It's that simple. And this precise judgment requires only one technique – a solid system of qualification.

Qualification in a Nutshell

Sales qualification is not a single event where managers ask salespeople: “Is this deal qualified or not?” Process-driven qualification requires a constant, inquisitive state of mind, where the salesperson is discovering and validating with questioning throughout the entire opportunity.

The Altify qualification process laid out in this book has been developed over 25 years and used by over a million salespeople worldwide to significantly boost win rates. In essence, it’s a series of carefully designed questions that you use to determine whether or not a deal is worth pursuing.

It provides a framework and continuous process of analysis to apply throughout every stage of opportunity, giving you greater insight into each potential deal, a clear overview of all your opportunities in relation to your goals, and a stronger position from which to make better decisions.

When put into action, we typically see our customers’ win rates leap skywards. From winning 3 out of every 10 deals, to winning 4 out of every 7, deals in the same time period. Their salespeople are now working on fewer deals, but they’re working on the right deals; the deals with the highest probability of success, the deals that matter.

These consistent improvements in results are based on one simple truth. Something even the most die-hard, gung-ho 'Act First, Think Later' salesperson should pause to consider. Fact is:

For every unqualified opportunity that you work, there's a qualified opportunity you're not working.

A solid system of qualification equips salespeople with laser-like focus. When they come to a crossroads, qualification gives them a higher vantage point to see more clearly which path has a better chance of delivering a positive outcome.

More importantly, qualification drives improved discipline, which provides the backbone for consistent focus and value for you and your customers.

Why Qualification is Everywhere

Without qualification, every date would be a blind date. No introductions first, no talking and flirting, seeing if there's a spark of attraction, learning a little about them, their interests, sense of humor. No checking out their style, seeing if they're your type or not.

Without qualification, you'd watch every movie all the way through, to judge if you like it or not. No initial checking if it's the type of movie you like. No watching the trailer, reading reviews or asking friends for opinions. No checking to see if there's a better option.

And just imagine hiring without qualification. Whoever answers the job advert first – they've got the job! No interview questions, no background research, not even a glance at their résumé. That stranger is now in your team, hired for the long run, whoever they are.

In any area of life, to make good decisions, a level of qualification is important. In sales, it's more than important, as it allows you to make informed decisions and judgments throughout the selling process. So it's absolutely vital, if you want to do the job well.

Selling is Tough. So Make Your Life Easier

As salespeople, we put a huge amount of time and emotional energy into our deals. Wouldn't you just love to know, early on, if that time and energy is going to be well spent?

When you possess that core confidence, selling simply gets easier, and more rewarding too. Good qualification helps avoid those frustrating situations when you realize the person you're talking to doesn't have the authority to act, or the customer doesn't have the funds yet, or isn't ready or right for some other reason. Far better to identify these unrealistic deals early on, so you can focus on a deal that's more likely to succeed.

It will get you to your quota faster, and save you a lot of frustration.

THE THREE BONUS BENEFITS OF **SOLID QUALIFICATION**

Qualification doesn't just help the salesperson. There are three major advantages that a framework for qualification can deliver to a business.

1. Quality Control for the sales organization

Well-qualified deals are more often better deals for the business. Not just for the sales organization, but also for the delivery organization. You end up better aligned with the customer.

Good qualification gives salespeople the structure within which to confidently decide not to pursue an opportunity.

If we are carefully qualifying and making an informed decision to pursue an opportunity, we naturally therefore qualify out of other deals. Making these decisions can be tough without a framework in place to strongly justify the choice.

2. Control and Credibility for the salesperson

As an individual, when you're asking others to support you on a bid or opportunity, effective qualification gives you rock-solid information on which to build your case. You are more confident in your ability to achieve a win-win outcome, so you confidently request the support you need.

Good qualification means that you are focused on the deals that have a higher probability of closing, and, you have a more solid idea of when they will close. Over time, this leads to greater accuracy in forecasting. So when you really need support, you've got the organization behind you. An accurate forecast saves the salesperson and the organization time and further reinforces the salesperson's credibility with an accurate view of the future.

A salesperson with the patience and skill to qualify well is a valued, respected and well-supported asset.

3. Buying Decision Alignment

Qualification helps you get aligned with the customer's buying decision, with the steps and stages that the customer is going through. There is the buying process, and the internal selling process. Sometimes without qualification, these two can get out of sync, which impacts forecasting and creates friction.

Can you think of a time when this happened on one of your deals? Perhaps the customer wanted information on pricing and project scoping, but you were still operating at an early stage in the sales process. Something was off kilter. Or perhaps you thought you were already thinking about solution collaboration, but the buyer was only just becoming aware of their needs. Qualification ensures you stay smoothly in line with the customer.

THE FOUR KEY QUESTIONS OF **QUALIFICATION**

OK, let's begin. Here's the process, refined over the years by Altify working with over a million salespeople worldwide. There are four key questions, each of which has five sub-questions. The four key questions are:

Is There An **OPPORTUNITY?**

Can We **COMPETE?**

Can We **WIN?**

Is It Worth **WINNING?**

For every prospective deal, apply these questions and their sub-questions, one by one, with care.

KEY QUESTION ONE:

IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY?

The first thing you want to do with any potential deal, is make sure there's an opportunity and the customer is serious about the project. Many projects inside the customer do not gain funding or support within the business, as other projects take priority. We want to make sure a project is real and important for the customer. To determine this, we have five sub-questions to ask.

1. Customer Project - 'Has an initiative been confirmed with resources assigned by a key player?'

Firstly, it's important to know the priority of this project compared to other projects. Finding out whether or not resources have been assigned by a key player will help confirm it. You have to understand the initiative, in detail. And work out what pressures and business drivers are causing them to act. The more you know about their business reasons for action, the better.

2. Customer Business - 'Is the customer in your sweet spot or target market?'

We're sure you've experienced selling outside your sweet spot or target market at one point or other. In these cases it's very difficult to win, especially if the customer is in the sweet spot of your competition. These deals are generally not recommended. However, sometimes you have to try outside your sweet spot, perhaps because of a new directive or a push into a new market. In these cases, it's better to know what difficulties you will face, so you can be ready to deal with them strategically.

3. Customer Financial Condition - 'Is the financial information compatible with the project?'

In other words, can they obtain the funding for this deal? Notice here we say 'compatible with the customer project.' There is a direct tie between project and financial condition because, for example, companies in bankruptcy spend lots of money to get out of trouble. So, in this extreme case, the financial condition matches the project – facing bankruptcy doesn't mean that they won't buy something. The finances must be aligned to the project, and the Compelling Event (see sub-question five).

4. Access to Funds - 'Are funds for the project approved, or can they be easily obtained?'

Access to funds is directly tied to priority projects and resources assigned by a key player. The funds should be there and ready to spend.

So we want to see ready funds, key players, business pressures, sweet spot positioning, and ideally the most important factor of all...

5. Compelling Event - 'Are there compelling, well-known business issues causing the key player(s) to act by a defined date?'

Does your deal have a Compelling Event? You want a straightforward YES / NO answer to this question. See the box out on page 19, 'Six Steps to Uncover a Compelling Event.'

A Compelling Event is a time sensitive response to internal or external pressures connected to Key Players that drives the customer to act, to make a decision, to solve a problem or to take advantage of an opportunity by a defined date.

At any time, every customer has various problems and opportunities for return on investment in their business. But they won't try to solve all these problems, and pursue all the opportunities for growth, in the immediate-term. Our job as salespeople is to work out which of the problems are so painful they must be solved now. And likewise, which are the opportunities for growth that are so strong, and certain, and immediate, they must be pursued now.

Those are the projects which will garner support, gain resources and will progress rapidly to a contract.

Compelling Events can be driven by internal or external pressures. External pressures are factors like their customers, competitors, the economy, and suppliers. Pressure on their business from things the customer does not control. These in turn cause them to push forward initiatives to relieve that pressure and achieve their goals.

The 'defined date' part is critical.

The date is the difference between a Compelling Event and a compelling reason to buy. A buyer may have a compelling reason to buy, but no consequence if a date is missed, or if a date slips 30 or 60 days. A Compelling Event defines their urgency, and ultimately drives forecast accuracy. Always remember, time is your worst competitive enemy. Urgent always trumps important, every time.

Should I only go for deals with a Compelling Event?

Compelling Events are hard to uncover. And, even if they exist, often you will only discover the reason that is driving the customer to buy. For example, a customer launched a project with us and it was only three months later, when we were helping with a deal review on a very large deal, that the CEO disclosed they had lost a very large bid six months previously with an airline. They had not done a deal review and missed fundamental decision criteria for the customer. Straight after that loss, he ordered his sales team to implement a sales methodology and deal review mechanism.

The truth is, many sellers close deals without a Compelling Event by its strictest definition. It's certainly ideal to have a date, but missing one is not necessarily a reason to qualify out and walk away. You do need a compelling reason at least, which gives the customer motivation to buy. The absence of a date potentially impacts your forecasting, so factor that in to your risk assessment for the deal.

Can a Compelling Event be created?

This is a tricky question. The strictest answer is no, you cannot create a Compelling Event. It has to be something that already exists in the buyer's environment or situation. Artificially creating a date, most likely with discounting, can be effective, but doesn't foster a win-win approach.

A more skilled approach is to uncover or expose a Compelling Event. Examining the business problem thoroughly with the customer can uncover factors the customer hadn't previously considered as a consequence. Such opportunities often become evident when you discuss the business impact of doing nothing.

Take the customer through these six questions, the purpose of which is to give you both clarity on any possible Compelling Event.

6 STEPS TO UNCOVER A COMPELLING EVENT

1
What is driving the customer to make a change?

2
What is the customer deadline for making a decision?

3
Is the status quo acceptable, or do they have to change?

4
What are the risks and benefits if they make a change?

5
What are the consequences if they do not change?

6
What will success look like and how will it be measured?

Always look to uncover and highlight internal or external pressures, perhaps from understanding their goals. Ideally, you want to uncover internal obstacles that are preventing them from achieving their initiatives, along with the consequences to the business if they are not resolved by a defined date.

If you have a compelling reason, you still need to uncover a defined date. You may be able to attach your projects to other projects that are date driven, perhaps to a product roll out or another key initiative.

Engage in early conversations about the impact to business of doing nothing. 'We have to do it' is not enough. Explore deeper into the business problem and find out why? What are the consequences of not moving forward? Be specific, uncover a date and then make sure it's crystal clear for all to see.

KEY QUESTION TWO:

CAN WE **COMPETE?**

The second key question 'Can We Compete?' is to establish whether you can bid competitively for this piece of business. You have another five sub-questions to guide you.

6. Formal Decision - 'Is this documented and well understood and attached to the key player(s)'

It's always fair to ask the customer for documented evidence of their decision criteria. You want to see any kind of document, even just an email or short list, giving you evidence and confidence that the customer has a real opportunity. And looking at the decision criteria itself will help you to evaluate if you can compete. As you'll see in key question three, it may not be the real decision criteria, but it should serve as a good indicator.

7. Solution Fit - 'Does your solution effectively address 100% of the customer's 'must have' requirements?'

In most cases, you and the competition will fit 80% of their requirements, but what matters is the 'must haves.' If you can't meet 100% of these, it might be time to qualify out, unless you know for sure the competition has even less. You must have Unique Business Value (see question 10), which is hard to deliver without hitting all 'must haves.' Ensure your answer is based on fact. If you don't have confirmed decision criteria, it's not possible to have a positive in solution fit

8. Sales Resources Requirements - 'Are they normal for an opportunity of this size?'

Estimate how much sales effort will be required to win the deal, what types of resources will be required and when. Make absolutely sure it'll be worth your time! How much time and effort will the opportunity take, and what will be the return on investment?

9. Current Relationship - 'Will a key player consider that you or your company will add value, based on a previous experience?'

It always helps to have someone on your side from the get-go. Ideally, you have some previous experience to build upon, some good perceptions already seeded in the customer's mind. All these factors really culminate in the next question...

10. Unique Business Value - 'Do you have Unique Business Value in this opportunity?'

Just like a Compelling Event, having Unique Business Value (UBV) is critical. What exactly is UBV?

"The specific capabilities of your solution that meet or solve the customer's business issue that a key player considers to be uniquely better than any alternative."

Your solution has to be unique. Something only you can provide. Scalability, speed, flexibility, innovation – these are not unique. It has to be a specific solution or service component that you know the customer values, which only you are providing to that customer.

And it has to fit in with their Compelling Event.

There's really no point explaining your UBV if it doesn't link to the customer's business drivers and the specific initiative. You have to be able to state a measurable benefit that you will deliver as a result of your UBV – measurable in the customer's terms, not yours.

If the customer isn't thinking and articulating these terms, then take a step backwards and ask yourself if there really is there really a project. How can you differentiate if you don't understand what's important to the customer?

Take the customer through the following 5 questions to guide a dialogue that will help uncover your Unique Business Value. These can be hard questions, but be ruthless and ask yourself all of them – your customer will!

The discussion in itself will help the buyer solidify the value of your solution.

5 TOUGH QUESTIONS TO FIND YOUR UBV

1
What is the specific or measurable business result that you will deliver?

2
How does the customer define value? How will they measure it?

3
How have you quantified this value in the customer's terms?

4
Has the customer confirmed their understanding of the value you will deliver?

5
How does this value differentiate you from your competitors?

KEY QUESTION THREE:

CAN WE **WIN?**

You can have the best solution and lose, and you can have the worst solution and win.

How can this be? The most common reason for losing a deal is selling to the wrong people, or communicating the wrong message to the right people. Always bear this in mind as you qualify each and every opportunity.

So this third key question – like most things in business and life – is all about people. The hard fact is, it's impossible to win without Inside Support. Maybe, once in a blue moon, a deal is closed without inside support. And when it is, often times implementation can prove challenging because there is no one to champion the effort. The next five sub-questions uncover whether you have adequate Inside Support.

11. Inside Support – 'Do you have more supporters and mentors than non-supporters?'

This sounds straightforward enough. But make sure you have evidence that your supporters are actually supporters, and not simply nice people (see our tip to test and train your inside support). You don't want all your 'supporters' to disappear and leave you to negotiate with only indifferent non-supporters at the table.

A SIMPLE TRICK TO TEST (AND TRAIN) ROCK SOLID INSIDE SUPPORT

A best practice we recommend is to always ask for something in return when the customer requests something of you. Asking for something in return is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their support.

If they object to giving you something in return, then you've learned something. It's these tests of each individual throughout the buying process which will give you evidence of real supporters, mentors or non-supporters.

Asking for something in return also strengthens your negotiating position down the line. A problem that often arises when you don't ask, and just give, or you over-serve (meaning they ask, you give, they ask, you give) is that you're training them on acceptable behavior. So when you finally make it to the negotiation table and they ask and you don't give or you ask for something in return, this is a change to your normal pattern and people can get upset.

It's important that you train them throughout the sales cycle, so when they ask, you give, but you also ask for something in return. Then when you get to the negotiation table and they ask and you ask for something in return – it's acceptable because this has been your behavior throughout the entire buying process.

12. Executive Credibility – 'Can you, or another person on the team, regularly access an Executive Key Player?'

When you have inside support, this should be leveraged to create Executive Credibility. You're rarely given Executive Credibility. It must be earned, and it's difficult to earn without inside support.

Deals can close without Executive Credibility. Typically this happens when what you're selling isn't in the executive range of interest. In this case, consider the Decision Maker and Approvers to be the "executives" and get that regular access!

Note that we say 'you or another person on the team.' We see many deals close where what's being sold is of interest to the executive, but the seller never gains direct access to them – only indirect access through their supporters – take a GM or Verizon or GE or any large corporate as the example. This is fine, as long as you have some sort of regular access.

13. Cultural Compatibility – 'Is the customer's culture similar to yours?'

This criteria is often overlooked. Have you ever engaged in an opportunity and everything just seems difficult? It may have been because the way that organization does business is very different to your business, like the difference between selling to central government and to a small start-up. Be aware of how organizations buy, sell, manage, and communicate.

If there is a difference, can you change your approach to suit, or is there a fundamental mismatch in culture? The wider the gap, the harder the sale will be, and the more effort will be required. The sales process will be different, the information you have to provide will be new content that you have to create, and you might need to swap team members to align with the different culture.

Sometimes the deal will justify the extra effort, but more often than not, there is another deal out there that is a better cultural fit. So the resource investment will be less, and the chance of winning will be higher.

14. Informal Decision Criteria – 'Have the Informal Decision Criteria been discussed and attached to the Key Players?'

Earlier on we talked about formal decision criteria. On the flip-side of that coin – the hidden side – is how the decision will really be made. You're only likely to uncover this information if you're winning in an opportunity.

It's what lies beyond the eight people in that committee going through a formal scoring process. Find out how the decision will really be made. What are the side conversations? Who are the people that will be guiding those conversations and the outcomes?

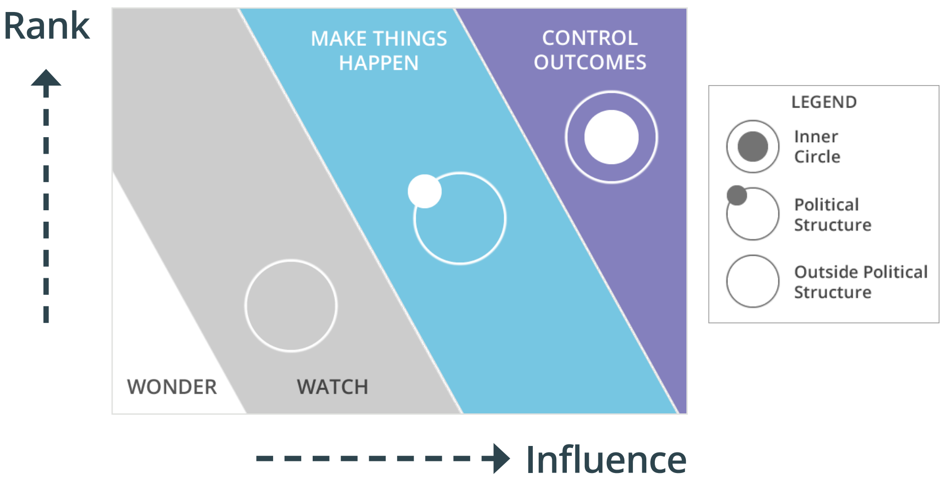
15. Relationship Alignment – 'Do you have a greater number of supporters or mentor Key Players (with coverage) than non-supporter Key Players on the Relationship Map?'

This whole segment of qualification culminates in relationship alignment. Basically, do you have more people within the organization who are positive towards you, as compared to your competitors?

The key thing here is Rank versus Influence. Yes, there are people within the organization who are senior in terms of their rank. But also, we want to identify and get onside the people who are senior in terms of their Influence. You want both Rank and Influence, but Influence, most of all.

You want the people who will own the projects; the people who make things happen in that political structure; the people who really kick off and set the direction and the strategy of the company. Always ask, 'are the people we're talking to in the inner circle?' 'Are they of high rank and high influence?'

WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS?



Who do you consider to be the Key Players? Key Players are those that fall into the Inner Circle or Political Structure. It's both people who have Rank and Influence, and others with Influence, on the customer team. Rank alone is often not enough. Just because a person has high Rank or title does not mean they have Influence.

You can also find people that have a high degree of Influence despite having a low Rank or title. These individuals are very valuable in the decision process. A bonus is they're often easier to access too. Look at the work and policy that Michelle Obama has influenced over the last eight years in the White House with President Obama. In the UK, who did Margaret Thatcher confide in and discuss difficult decisions with before she decided Policy? – Denis, her husband. No rank, but ultra-high influence. So in the evaluation teams, you should identify those people who have real Influence as Key Players.

IDENTIFYING INFLUENCE NETWORKS

Influence, as opposed to rank or authority, flows in non-traditional directions - from subordinate to superior or across departmental boundaries.

When you overlay Inner Circle and Political Structure to an organization chart as we've done above, you can see the Key Players (in the blue and purple shadows) and how they relate to others on the customer team. You can then identify who likes you (in green), who doesn't like you (in red) and who you're not yet sure of (in yellow). You can then figure out how to access these people.

Use this graphic to establish if you have inside support (people with green bars). If you have Executive Credibility (Title, Rank, Authority, with green bars) and if you have Relationship Alignment (Inner Circle and Political Structure, with green bars).

In the example here, from a qualification perspective, at this point in the buying process, we haven't yet achieved that criteria. So should we walk away? That all depends on where we are in the buying process. If it's still early days, we should navigate the Political Structure to achieve Inside Support, etc. However, if it's late in the buying process, we'd say we're not in a good position to win and would need to make a calculated decision based on our ability to access the Key Players.

KEY QUESTION FOUR:

IS IT WORTH WINNING?

Thus far, you know a good opportunity exists, you can compete and you can win. You may be chomping at the bit, eager to dive in, but there's one last step in the qualification process, something most people leave out.

It is essential to confirm that this deal is worth the effort to win. Remember, the great equalizer is those 24 limited hours in a day. You always want to put your time and resources into the area of biggest impact towards your goals. You know this plant will grow, but are there others nearby, which will grow faster and bigger, if you water them instead?

Imagine you have two opportunities to pursue, for which you need an equal amount of support from your organization – bid resources, pre-sales, product specialists. If you can only go for one, which one do you choose? Of course it's rarely so straightforward. But this exercise helps to remind you of the most important premise of qualification:

For every unqualified opportunity that you work, there's a qualified opportunity you're not working.

So this last question looks at 'the rest of the story;' focusing on your internal ROI or expected 'payback' for the effort you will apply to win the opportunity.

The first three key questions may have all been a resounding 'Yes!' But then you may find the deal size is so small, there's no future business, and the risk is too high for success. So the opportunity just isn't worth winning. These last five questions will help solidify this position for you for any deal.

16. Short Term Revenue – 'Is the initial size of the opportunity equal to or greater than the average opportunity size for your business?'

This question is clear and simple. Will you make enough money? But even if short-term revenue is low, it may be worth pursuing, because of future revenue potential.

17. Future Revenue – 'Is future revenue equal to or greater than the average lifetime value of a customer for your business?'

We've all seen cases where the short-term revenue is small, but the future revenue is high, such as in a pilot situation. So the small deal is your foot in the door to bigger business down the line.

18. Profitability – 'Is profitability equal to or greater than the average profit on an opportunity for your business?'

Like all decisions in business, make sure you don't muddle up revenue with profit. High revenue figures can be seductive, but if the margins just aren't there, is it worth it?

19. Degree of Risk – 'Is the customer likely to succeed?'

Risk is always a factor. Perhaps you're selling something untested, like a new product. Or you're selling into a new industry. Perhaps the type of solution or type of customer is all new too. Or are there lots of third parties involved? Beware of high-risk opportunities.

After the sale, will this customer demand lots of time and effort, more than usual? This links back to question No.1 and No.6. Do you understand what the customer is trying to achieve and are you confident you can deliver?

Remember that if the customer fails, harsh as it sounds, you will never be able to sell to them again. And bad news travels further, faster, and lasts longer than good news. As an individual salesperson, and a representative of your enterprise, can you afford the damage to your reputation if a customer fails?

20. Strategic Value – 'Will this customer have a greater than normal positive strategic impact to the company?'

Finally, always consider the full long-term strategic impact of the opportunity. Ask yourself, 'is it good, clean business? Is it core to what you offer? Is it easy to contract? Is it easy for you to deliver? Is it easy to support? Will this deal help you achieve your 'broader company goals and targets?'

There may be other strategic advantages. Perhaps by winning this piece of business, you're keeping one of your key competitors out of one of your largest customers.

There may also be instances where short-term value is low and strategic value is high, but risk of failure is also high. In these cases, you have justification to ask for 'special' resources to mitigate the risk.

Consider all angles, and boil it down to evidence demonstrating these strategic benefits.

QUALIFICATION CHEAT SHEET

Key Question One: “Is There An Opportunity?”

- **1. Customer Project** – ‘Has an initiative been confirmed with resources assigned by a key player?’
- **2. Customer Business** – ‘Is the customer in your sweet spot or target market?’
- **3. Customer Financial Condition** – ‘Is the financial information compatible with the project?’
- **4. Access to Funds** – ‘Are funds for the project approved, or can they be easily obtained?’
- **5. Compelling Event** – ‘Are there compelling, well-known business issues causing the key player(s) to act by a defined date?’

Key Question Two: “Can We Compete?”

- **6. Formal Decision Criteria** – ‘Is this well documented and attached to the key player(s)?’
- **7. Solution Fit** – ‘Does your solution effectively address 100% of the customer’s “must have” requirements?’
- **8. Sales Resources Requirements** – ‘Are they normal for an opportunity of this size?’
- **9. Current Relationship** – ‘Will a key player consider that you or your company will add value, based on a previous experience?’
- **10. Unique Business Value** – ‘Do you have Unique Business Value in this opportunity?’

Key Question Three: “Can We Win?”

- **11. Inside Support** – ‘Do you have more supporters and mentors than non-supporters and enemies?’
- **12. Executive Credibility** – ‘Can you, or another person on the team, regularly access an Executive Key Player?’
- **13. Cultural Compatibility** – ‘Is the customer’s culture similar to yours?’
- **14. Informal Decision Criteria** – ‘Have the Informal Decision Criteria been discussed and attached to the Key Players?’
- **15. Relationship Alignment** – ‘Do you have a greater number of supporters or mentor Key Players (with coverage) than non-supporter or enemy Key Players on the Relationship Map?’

Key Question Four: “Is It Worth Winning?”

- **16. Short Term Revenue** – ‘Is the initial size of the opportunity equal to or greater than the average opportunity size for your business?’
- **17. Future Revenue** – ‘Is future revenue equal to or greater than the average lifetime value of a customer for your business?’
- **18. Profitability** – ‘Is profitability equal to or greater than the average profit on an opportunity for your business?’
- **19. Degree of Risk** – ‘Is the customer likely to succeed?’
- **20. Strategic Value** – ‘Will this customer have a greater than normal positive strategic impact to the company?’

PUTTING IT ALL INTO ACTION

Congratulations, you now have the finest qualification tool in the world at your disposal. You can quickly see any opportunity for what it really is – the seeds of a wonderful business deal, or a weed that needs pruning from your forecast.

Learn the four key qualification questions well. Next time your phone rings or you get a meeting request from a customer, think about the full 20 questions. Quickly go through them, marking a plus or a minus for that opportunity. Think about two or three key questions you have to ask the customer, which perhaps you have a minus or a question mark against. It might be about the Compelling Event, or Executive Credibility, or Unique Business Value.

Before you book that meeting, phone up the customer and ask them to explain the negative or unknown factors. Ask them to clarify the pressures behind the initiative, the key people involved in the problem, and the possible solution. Ask what their decision criteria is and how they'll be making a decision, or what the basis of their decision is going to be founded upon. Try to uncover a Compelling Event if within reach.

All you need to do is ask.
This isn't a time for restraint.

You'll find one of two things will happen. Either they won't answer the question because they don't want to give you the information, or they don't know it. Alternatively, they'll give you all the information and you'll be in a much stronger situation. You'll be able to hit that meeting already running, and move the opportunity forward faster. If they don't or can't give you information, get them to point you in the direction of a person who can. Give them reasons to speak to others who know more, so you can help make them successful.

It's important to see qualification as a continuous process. Ask all four key questions, with all their sub-questions, at every stage, to make sure what you originally thought was true remains true.

As you begin to qualify with more confidence, you'll discover you simply start working on fewer and better opportunities. As a result, you'll be winning more deals, because you are working the deals you can win, the ones that matter.

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