

# Proposals Don't Sell Anything

Find out why they want to do things differently before giving a proposal

STORY BY DAN STALP | PHOTO BY KENNY JOHNSON



**Q:** *When I present a proposal, how do I find out what they are really thinking about it?*

—Dave Perky, partner, TPP Certified Public Accountants

**A:** Your question reminds me of job hunting after college. In the late '80s, we would have “Dear John” parties with recent graduates who had received the letter saying, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

Back then, we'd call and ask the employer for constructive feedback as to why we didn't get hired. At that point, we had nothing to lose, right? The problem is they had already hired someone else and the best we could do was to do better next time.

To your selling question above, I wonder: Why don't we ask those questions before we lose the business rather than after? One of our Sandler Rules is: You can't lose something you don't have.

We believe: A proposal confirms the order and doesn't sell anything. Before I present the proposal, I want to know, what are their reasons for doing things differently? What is the cost if they don't do anything differently? Is there a budget available, or where will the money come from? What happens if I meet the budget or am below the budget? Deal or no deal? Who gets to make this decision, and when will they do so?

If I can't get any of those answers, then a proposal isn't necessary. If they don't seem to care about that, what are they telling you? If they really do care about that, what are they telling you?

**Q:** *Calling on executives often requires a lead time of three weeks or more. Even then, those meetings can be postponed. Any suggestions on how to avoid delays in these meetings?*

—Kirk Young, CEO, Job Match Assessment

**A:** Another Sandler Rule is: You can't be upset with someone for doing something you didn't tell them not to do.

There might be several reasons as to why they are delaying the meeting. Being busy, frankly, is not a good reason. We are all busier than we used to be. So possibly, it is one of these reasons:

1. They are feeling pressure to meet with you and don't really believe they need your product or service.
2. They do want to meet, but they have a bad habit of breaking appointments.
3. They do want to meet, and they don't want to cancel, so they postpone.
4. There is some other reason.

So getting back to the Sandler Rule above, we want to give them the ability to be honest with us earlier in this process. If it's No. 1, allow them to cancel the meeting. Just make sure they know what they are saying “no” to. If it's Nos. 2 or 3, you want to find out if this is a chronic or sporadic issue. Of course, the latter is easier to deal with. The chronic issue makes me wonder if they qualify to be your client. No. 4 is a catchall: There could be a really good reason to possibly cancel, but I don't need to wait three weeks to find out. We can discuss it now and come up with a plan B should that arise.

Have a question for Dan?

- ▶ [askthesalescoach@antheppublishing.com](mailto:askthesalescoach@antheppublishing.com)
- ▶ [linkedin.com/in/danstalp](https://www.linkedin.com/in/danstalp)
- ▶ 913-451-1760, x101

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**Q:** *Coach Dan, we sell to many companies with multiple decision makers: co-owners, etc. Should we approach these prospects differently than single decision makers?*

—Paul Weber, president, EAG Advertising

**A:** Your question tells me you are selling larger, more complicated deals. Congratulations!

One Sandler Rule to consider is: Everyone in an organization can tell you “no.” Typically, only one person in an organization can actually tell you “yes.”

So the key is to find out who has the “yes” authority. Focus there without ignoring other influencers, sometimes called stakeholders; the person who can say “yes” also can delegate that decision to someone else if they choose.

Larger deals garner more profit because they're harder—and you need to be a much better salesperson to play in this arena. So find out what is personally at stake for each of the shareholders, most importantly for the decision maker. The person who can say “yes” can and will trump the others if they so choose. However, you don't want to underestimate the personal pain of the decision maker in having an unhappy team. This alone could outweigh the advantages of your product. **KCB**