

SPIN Strategic Questioning

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The purpose of this assignment is to explore and demonstrate the practical techniques used with the S.P.I.N. questioning system for personal selling. To begin, I briefly define and describe personal selling. Next, I define the S.P.I.N. system and describe where it fits within the context of personal selling. Then, I explain each step of the S.P.I.N. system and illustrate, with included dialogue, its use in a practical application (see Appendices). This dialogue is between a university recruiter and prospective student. Finally, I conclude with a brief analysis to show why the S.P.I.N. system works and how it is important for the success of personal selling.

Personal selling refers to the interpersonal interactions between buyers and sellers to initiate, develop, and enhance customer relationships with business (Ingram, LaForge, Ramon, & Schwepker, 2019). Personal selling can be described as the practical art of persuasion through problem solving. For the buyer, personal selling is a search for solutions. For the seller, it can mean a search for problems. Different people have different problems and different problems call for different solutions. With that said, there are countless varieties of techniques, methods, and approaches adapted by salespeople to be successful persuasive problem solvers.

The S.P.I.N. technique is a prominent method of questioning that stands for Situation, Problem, Implication, Need-Payoff. In order to give context to where S.P.I.N. fits into the overall sales process, we can break down the sales process, or sales call, into four distinct stages: preliminaries, investigating, demonstrating, and commitment. Within these four distinct stages, the S.P.I.N. system is used during the, arguably most important, investigating stage (Rackham, 1988). The investigating stage happens during the initiation phase of a sale, where the seller and buyer begin to interact. During this investigative stage, S.P.I.N.'s four-part sequence of questions are designed to discover the buyer's situation and needs, expose their explicit problems, reveal the implications of their problems, and advance the the proposal of solutions into the need stage.

During the initial stage of S.P.I.N., the seller asks general questions about the buyer's situation (Appendix A). Situation questions are essential in the beginning to establish a positive relationship while assessing the general needs and expectations of the buyer. This can be thought of as the feeling-out part of the process because it can be touch-and-go depending on the dynamics of the buyer and their situation. The approach and delivery of questions during this stage should be adjusted appropriately to reflect the unique nature of the interaction. It is important to practice active listening skills and employ open questions here to allow the prospective buyer to fully express their situation and needs.

After learning about the situation and establishing an understanding of buyer needs. The seller begins to switch focus to Problem questions (Appendix B). Here, the seller begins to probe further about specific issues, existing difficulties, developing problems, and any other areas where the prospective buyer may be explicitly dissatisfied with their situation. When answering, the buyer should focus on current and developing problems that are relevant to the seller's product service offering. Many times a buyer can start talking about unrelated problems. So, the seller needs to guide the interaction with questions about problems, in which he can provide a solution. In order to avoid any issues that would threaten the trust bond relationship, staying focused, explicit, and transparent are very important during this stage.

After explicit problems have been expressed and addressed, the seller begins asking implication questions (Appendix C). Implication questions enable the buyer to think about the extended impact of their current problems. When formulating questions here, the seller should think about all of the secondary and tertiary problems that occur as a result of the seller's primary problems. Answering these implication questions allows the buyer to have greater perspective and view their existing situation from a broader scope. Implication questions can change the

buyer's perceived needs by magnifying their problems and intensifying the urgency for a solution.

The final step in the SPIN system is Need-Payoff (Appendix D). After the seller builds up the urgency to of the situation problems with implication questions, need-payoff questions are presented to propose viable solutions. These questions are generally more positive than in any other step because, instead of consequences and problems, they switch focus to solutions and benefits. These questions should place the prospective buyer in a hypothetical progressive mindset where all their problems are resolved and business is booming! If the seller is successful here, the buyer should be ready to commit and advance the sale. Good Need-Payoff questions lead the buyer to dream and think about bigger and better things to come. This leads to the proverbial fist pump, high-five, and hand-shake to seal the deal.

In conclusion, the SPIN Questioning system is an indispensable tool that every sales professional should have under their belt. Although there are a variety of approaches, methods, and techniques that work, the SPIN system is studied as one of the most comprehensive and successful (Rackham, 1988). For a questioning system to be effective, it needs to generate involvement, provoke thinking, provide information, clarify, show interest, gain confirmation, and advance the sale (Ingram, LaForge, Ramon, Schwepker, & Williams, 2019). Here, we see that SPIN checks all of those boxes. I chose to study the SPIN system because it objectively categorizes the overall subjective process of selling. For personal selling, SPIN turns—what is otherwise considered an art—into a science.

References

Ingram, T. N., LaForge, R. W., Ramon, A. A., Schwepker, C. H., & Williams, M. R. (2019). *Sell* (6th ed.). Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.

Rackham, N. (1988). *SPIN Selling*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

## Appendix A

**Situation**

University Recruiter: “Hello, my name is Caleb. I’m calling on behalf of the University of West Alabama. I see you are interested in our program and have requested more information in regards to our Personal Selling program...”

Prospective Student: “Hi Caleb, Yes. I just saw an ad on YouTube and wanted to know more about it...”

University Recruiter: “Ok great, No problem! We have a link here with more information. If you don’t mind me asking, is there anything specific that has you interested in this particular program?”

Prospective Student: “Yes, actually I’m looking to start my own business but just don’t know where to start?”

University Recruiter: “Well you seem to be on the right path...mmmWhat type of business are you looking to start?”

Prospective Student: “I’m thinking a tshirt or lawn service...but I’ve got so many good ideas, I just don’t know how to organize them.”

University Recruiter: “I can understand that, Our Personal Selling program will definitely be able to help you with that. Are you looking to enroll for our upcoming term?”

## Appendix B

**Problem**

Prospective Student: “I’m not sure if I can start right now, it might have to wait. I’m dealing with personal issues so my schedule is limited and it looks expensive.

University Recruiter: “I totally get it. We do offer online courses for students with demanding schedules and we also have several options for financial assistance if that’s something you would be interested in.

Prospective Student: “O wow, I didn’t know that.

University Recruiter: “Here is a link to the services we offer for that. Do you have anymore concerns? Would you be entering as a new student or transfer?”

Prospective Student: “Well, I’m not sure, I’ve taken some courses in the past but don’t know if they count for anything.”

University Recruiter: “No problem! If you’re not sure we can check for you and have any credits transferred, here’s a link to a form. Btw, Ignore the \$45 fee at the top, I’ll waive that charge for you.

Prospective Student: “Thanks, I don’t want to make any decisions right now or sign any contracts”

University Recruiter: “Of course, No Worries! This is just a transcript release form to see if you have any transferrable courses. It usually takes a couple of days to go through so you’ll have plenty of time to make a decision on enrollment”

## Appendix C

**Implication**

Prospective Student: “Ok thanks. I just didn’t want to sign any contracts that I can’t honor.

University Recruiter: “Right, you’ve got plenty of time to look over everything before making a decision. Like I said, this usually takes a few days. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, I’ll be happy to help!

Prospective Student: “If none of my credits transfer, will I have to start from the beginning?”

University Recruiter: “The number of courses that transfer do affect where you start in the program, but that is usually not an issue. The Personal Selling program generally takes students two years to complete following the academic calendar, but the schedule is flexible, and some students take longer while others finish faster.

Prospective Student: “So, I can work at my own pace?”

University Recruiter: “Yes.”

Prospective Student: “Nice, I just don’t want to start something that is going to take four years to finish. I just don’t know if I can dedicate that much time to study right now.”

University Recruiter: “I completely understand, that was the same problem I had four years ago. It’s a tough decision but one you’ll thank yourself for in the end.”

Prospective Student: “Yea, that’s the problem. There’s a million other things I could accomplish, and I just don’t know if I have the time to put into it.”

University Recruiter: “I know you said you were looking to start your business...?”

Prospective Student: “Yea, and I’m looking to get a new job soon. I also just got engaged so we’re looking into buying a new home, and then of course...my parents really want me to get a degree...”

University Recruiter: “Congrats! It sounds like you stay busy. If you don’t mind me asking, why type of job are you looking to get soon...”

Prospective Student: “Yeah, that’s why I just don’t know if this is the right time to start something new. And...I don’t mind, I’m working nights at stocking shelves right now but I got an offer for management position that pays twice.

Prospective Student: “but theres a couple of problems with that, first I have to switch my schedule to work during the day, and second they want me to be in school or have a degree.

University Recruiter: “I see, you have a lot going on”

Prospective Student: “Yea a lot, what would you do if you were me?”



## Appendix D

**Need-Payout**

University Recruiter: “Well, I can’t say for sure, I think only you know the answer to that.”

Prospective Student: “Yea, I guess...”

University Recruiter: “If you’re concerned about the time you could spend doing other things, Just look at all the time you put into this program as preparation for your t-shirt and lawn care business. By the time you’re done you will be able to finally start the business you want.”

Prospective Student: “I didn’t think about it like that.”

University Recruiter: “Also, you may be able to get that advancement at work if they see you’re enrolled.

Prospective Student: “Hopefully. They did tell me that.”

University Recruiter: “You said it paid double what you get now...”

Prospective Student: “Yah!”

University Recruiter: “Then you may be able to buy your dream home”

Prospective Student: “Keep going...”

University Recruiter: “How does a degree sound with your new wife, home, and job?”

Prospective Student: “Don’t forget respect from my parents”

University Recruiter: “So when do you want to start?”

Prospective Student: “I WANT TO START NOW!”

University Recruiter: “Do you have any more questions.”

Prospective Student: “Not today.”

University Recruiter: “Ok, I’ll get back in touch when your transcripts come in.”

Prospective Student: “Alright.”

University Recruiter: “In the meantime, be sure to reach out if you need anything, my extension is #9886”

Prospective Student: “Ok, will do thanks!”

University Recruiter: “You’re welcome, Goodbye”