

Discovering Your Value: Who Are You?

Step No. 1: Begin your introspective journey up the value ladder.

By Leo Pusateri

In the May issue we talked about the concept of the value ladder, why it was created, the seven steps (or questions clients ask or think about) and why it is so important to understand and articulate your value. It may seem easy to explain who you are to prospects and clients, but take a moment to recall the various ways you've articulated this in the past. Many of you will realize that what you've said is inconsistent and unclear. In numerous cases, you simply are "winging it."

You cannot deliver your message or your value with confidence, passion and speed (lack of hesitation) if you are merely winging it with every presentation to prospects or clients."In this column—and those to follow in the months ahead—I will take you through the *process* of answering the seven critical questions—or steps—on the value ladder. Each column will help you confidently answer one of the questions. I'll also help you build your unique value proposition (UVP), core business beliefs, your process and more. Later, we'll work on advanced applications for the ladder.

Before I begin, I'll share a story with you that I usually convey to participants in my training classes. It's about my brother, Vince, and the impact that his Air Force serial number made on me. I was about 10 years old (and it's been more than 30 years since he served in Pakistan in a special intelligence unit during the Vietnam War), but I remember the number as though I heard it only yesterday—AF116400693. It made a big impression on me. There was something tangible about that ID number. It was who he WAS. It identified him immediately. It was concise, and it was repeated over and over again.

The reason I share this is because it was an important and memorable experience. As we know, impressions are critical, and we only get one chance to make a meaningful one. We all have a "name, rank and ser-

ial number" in life. Can we say who we are as quickly and as consistently as those in the military are trained to do?

Who Are You?

Three words that sound simple and ask a simple question. But is it really? This is the first critical question that begins your journey up the value ladder.

When a prospect asks about your background, how do you respond? With your name, rank and serial number? Remember, most often people want to know *what you do*, not just your name as the question implies.

For example, how many times has a prospect said to you, "Tell me a little bit about yourself," or "How long have you been in the business?" It's crucial to have answers to the many ways prospects will ask this question. It establishes immediate credibility with your prospect if you articulate your answer swiftly and confidently.

Create A Lasting Impression—First

The question "Who are you?" is the first thing a prospect wants to know. You don't want to wing it with an answer. When you wing it, you present an obvious lack of confidence in yourself and your message. It is powerful to look a prospect in the eye and be precise when he or she says, "Tell me a little bit about yourself." What would be five top answers you could give a prospect that would clearly and succinctly introduce yourself and your organization?"

Think about this for a few minutes. Be introspective.

Do you immediately know what you would say, without any hesitation? What would you say if David Letterman, Oprah Winfrey or Ted Koppel put a microphone in your face on TV and asked, "Who are you?" Could you answer without stuttering and stammering? Could you answer with confi-



dence, passion and speed? Could you be concise, without gulping and searching for words, stuttering, stammering or winging it?

Your Gut Instinct

Here's an example of what you might say when you're asked "Who are you?" questions:

"I'm Sam Smith, a financial advisor with the advisory firm of Smith, Jones and Temple. I am head of a planning and investment-management team that specializes in investment solutions and life-cycle planning for affluent individuals. Our firm is headquartered in the sunny paradise of San Diego, California, and has a combined 60 years of industry experience among our four team members." Notice Sam emphasizes the words *specializes*, *solutions* and *sunny paradise*. Be precise in your word selection and make memorable statements, with *precise* being the key word.

A person might then say, "Well, Sam, how long have you been an advisor?" or "Tell me more about your background." Even though a person first may ask who you are, *many times he then will ask more questions, probing deeper in search of knowing more about you, both personally and professionally.*

Your intuition will tell you how much information is enough. You don't need to say, "Let me tell you *everything* about my business and personal background." You have to be "in the moment" with each prospect or client. For each client situation, you have to intuitively assess how much is appropriate; experience makes it easier for you.

Think again about how you would respond to the "Who are you?" question. Does your response position you in important ways? Is your response creating further dialogue and trust? Is it building rapport with your client? Remember, in explaining who you are, the way *in which you respond* makes that critical, first good impression even more powerful.

Let's Get Started!

As you climb the value ladder with me over the next several months and continue to trust and refine the process, you'll return to the early questions such as "Who are you?" to strengthen and tighten your previous answers. Some of

you will reach the last step on the value ladder, "Why should I do business with you?" and realize common themes among your answers to the questions on the ladder that make you truly unique.

If you called 10 of your clients, would the same themes run throughout their comments? If you feel confident, self-assured and knowledgeable, would your clients say the same about you?

Find a quiet place where you can think about—and write down—the answers to "Who are you?" Brainstorm, evaluate and eliminate, then use what's appropriate. Here are some guidelines to follow:

1. Discuss who you are by giving your name and title, then who you work for.
2. Describe your organization. Possibly provide your firm's history, strategic alliances and other business relationships.
3. If you're part of a team or a department, identify it.
4. Describe its function and explain how your team or department operates, and what your role is.

If you feel it is appropriate, professional information can be presented to your client as well. This might include company location, years in business, years with your current organization, members of your team, former employers, key clients, new clients per year, assets under management, areas of expertise, professional designations, special education, professional affiliations, special background and so on.

Personal information might include where you live, where you grew up, family data, educational background, hobbies, sports, and charities or civic organizations with which you are active.

What I have found is that many of these considerations are taken for granted. But, I must emphasize, offer your professional and personal information only if—and when—appropriate. Your intuition will guide you here. This personal reflection and information-gathering also sets the stage for the introspection that continues with developing your UVP.

Ready For A Quiz?

Now that you've thoroughly examined who you are with thought-provoking questions, it's a good idea to test yourself on how well you think you could answer "Who are you?" in a real situa-

tion. Remember, you don't want to practice on your prospect. So practice now.

Here are some strategic questions to consider:

- How well do I position myself now?
- What is my typical response to this question?
- In what ways does my response help to begin my differentiation process?
- In what ways does my response help to set the stage for further dialogue, building trust and rapport?
- What other information does my team need to answer this question at a world-class level?
- If my team and I can answer this question at a world-class level, what impact will this have on the sales process?
- What impression will I make in my marketplace if my sales organization fails to respond to this question with confidence, passion and speed?

Look Yourself In The Eye

Look in your mirror. Spend some time reflecting. "Who are you?" is an easy question to answer on the surface. But with proper introspection and reflection, you soon realize how deep your self-analysis can go. You'll be surprised at what you'll learn about yourself by going through this exercise. And you'll discover aspects of yourself that you previously did not bring up, even to your existing clients.

Discovery starts with that first step and, in turn, will give you ammunition to make a powerful first impression. It's much like reading a good book. To keep you turning the pages, a book must capture your interest or curiosity immediately. But it also must continue to keep your interest, all the way to a dynamic and satisfying end.

One of the most important lessons you can take with you after reading this column is this: Your compelling response to the question "Who are you?" will automatically lead your prospect to ask more about what you do. That's the next logical question on the ladder. If your answer to this first question is thought provoking and compelling enough to lead the prospect to ask, "Well, what do you do?" then you have crafted and perfected the answer to the first step on the ladder.

Your introspection begins with "Who are you?" and is a strategic discovery at its best. And early introspection leads to

self-actualization. Don't take this question for granted. It's like blocking and tackling in football. Adherence to discipline and mastery will set you apart.

Climb the ladder and take note if your perceptions change. Is this who you really are? Is this who you truly want to be? Stay tuned! ©

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