



## THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

# Get them to ask one question

It's not the product or service you are selling that matters to a prospect. It's what ails them and what you can do about it that matters. If you are selling quality, capability, service and professionalism, you are selling exactly the same thing that everyone else is selling. When this is the case, the only clear point of differentiation for the prospect is price. And if you are not consistently the lowest price vendor you will more often than not fail to win the sale.

I tell salespeople I work with to change the approach. It's not about what you have (landscape services) and how good they may be, it's about what they need and whether they believe you are the answer to their problems. Therefore save the sales pitch. This is especially true when you consider the process of trying to win work with a property manager when you are only one of many bidders.

The first thing to realize in this circumstance is that their key concern is not with the "goodness or rightness" of proper landscape. Their key concern is keeping their job. They cannot afford to make the wrong decision. The second thing to realize is that the way they keep their job is by keeping their customers happy (whether it is homeowners in an HOA or tenants in a commercial property) and by managing their costs. Lastly, it is important to realize that most of these decision-making people believe that they are underpaid, overworked and under loved and that you potentially only add to and complicate their already busy lives. So excuse

them if they are not bowled over by the "fact" that you have a great water management program.

Taking all this into consideration I suggest a better differentiation strategy — one not based on your product but one based on your selling process. If you want to improve your close rates, you have to look, sound and be different and get them engaged in solving their problems (i.e. reducing tenant dissatisfaction and managing a landscape budget). If you fail at this you will look and sound like everyone else.

Let's start with the obvious. You already know their problems in general, so the challenge is to connect their problems in a very specific way to your services as the potential solution. Doing this requires confidence, some moxie and expertise. The application of these practices is directed at one very specific outcome. You want them to ask you a question. When they do this, they are now engaged with you in creating a solution to what ails them. The way to get them to ask you a question is to sow seeds of doubt.

In many instances property managers are vague about the origin, accuracy and "goodness" of the specs for their properties. They are however, certain about one thing, and that is that everyone has to bid to them. Unless, of course, someone suggests that the specs may not be the best way to keep tenants happy and manage costs. For example, you can sow the seeds of doubt as follows: *"Mr. Property Manager, the problem very often with property specs is that they are old and designed for a very different landscape than you now have. The result is you could be spending more money than you need to in the wrong places increasing costs and the odds that your tenants won't be happy because the problems they see are very often baked into the old services spec."*

Once this is said, it is time to be silent and wait for them to think about this. If they ask you a question like, "Really? How does that work?" you are now in the sales process. If they don't, then your chances of making the sale go down dramatically. At the very least, you won't sound like every other salesman. And that's your goal — be different and get them to ask you one question.

The way they keep their job is by **keeping customers happy** and **by managing their costs.**