Moderator: Welcome everyone! Today we're going to talk about moving the sale forward. If you've ever struggled with stalled deals, prospects going dark after a great call or just dealing with prospects who appear to be shopping you just for price, you're at the right place today. Our panelists for not only today's session, but for the entire series, are Adam Shapiro, President of Sales Reform School, and Jason Stone, director of sales here at Frontline Selling. So let's bring these guys in with video and get right to our first question.

Moderator: **Jeff from Phoenix asks, "I thought we had a great first conversation now they've gone silent, what do I do?"**

*Short Answer: First, always make sure you secure next steps before getting off the phone. Second, return to your cadence, using all the tools at your disposal. Live phone calls, voicemail, email, Linkedin, other ways of contacting them. Find out if they have an admin or someone who could assist you in getting back on their calendar. Lastly,, start researching other potential stakeholders and connecting with them, and remind them of the progress you’ve already made with your prospect.*

Full Explanation:

Jason Stone: Right, yeah, so Jeff I think the first thing is define next steps. I always try to tell my folks not to get off to a prospect call, discovery call without next steps. Whether that is in your sales process a demo, a proposal, or whatever it may be, just define the next steps what you'd like to accomplish, and follow up. Then always have two or three dates and times available, so they have options, so it's not this I'll get back to you, send me an invite, they decline it. As we all know it's a lot more difficult to say no when you're physically on the phone or physically in front of somebody. I always try to make sure that my folks have defined what the next steps are in a successful conversation mutually. I always say, we've had success with our clients after a discovery call we typically go into X and we set expectations for that call and when it's going to happen. Again I think that that's the biggest thing. To say we thought we had a great conversation, if it was so great why didn't you set up a next call. Or otherwise you just got off the phone all excited, and you forgot to define next steps.

Jason Stone: Or make sure that you keep that momentum going. The other thing about this too, I think it will, it gives you the clue whether it was a good call or not. If they're as excited as you are about it, and you feel like you've driven home the value, or there's some opportunity there, they should feel the same thing, and they'll want to go ahead and set up another call.

Adam Shapiro: Let's assume that you actually did setup next steps. You had it on your calendar, both yours and your prospect’s calendar, and they did actually miss the appointment. First I do want to say it happens- life gets in the way sometimes. Buyers are not necessarily going to be as considerate as you want them to be. Let's go after three things. First let's return to our cadence, using all the tools at your disposal. Live phone calls, voicemail, email, Linkedin, other ways of contacting them. Return to that cadence of what it was that was so special about your initial conversation, reminding them about it, and then scheduling that next conversation, and asking for that next schedule specifically.

Adam Shapiro: While you're doing that, if this prospect is high enough in an organization that they might possibly have an administrative assistant or someone that runs their calendar, call the switchboard at this company and ask if Mr. or Ms. Smith has someone who manages their calendar. Then when you get through to that person explain, what's happened so far in your sales cycle, and ask to get put back on their calendar. Third, go to your other contacts and determine who are the other people that we would want to talk to in this prospect's environment, and start talking with them as well. You can leverage the good parts of your previous conversation to try to get those conversations going.

Moderator: **Callie in Denver said she works for a software company, actually a SASS organization and she said, "What should I be asking for after the first call"?**

*Short Answer: Your defined ask needs to be around enlarging the group of people, the sphere of influence that you have at your prospect's location to get greater buy-in. This helps get them socializing what you have to offer, the problems you can solve, the goals that you could help them attain. Your defined ask needs to be around getting other people involved in your buying cycle, or selling cycle.*

Full Explanation:

Adam Shapiro: Okay, so our last webinar we talked about how your initial meaningful conversation needs to have a defined ask, and even a back-up defined ask. Let's assume you've done that, please reference our previous webinar available on the FRONTLINE Selling website, and the SalesReformSchool website. Let's assume you've got those defined asks in there. Go back and remind your prospect about that. On the lower end of the offering spectrum if you will, if your SAAS offering is light on cost, light on total cost of ownership we need to shorten this sale cycle, get in there, and make their evaluation happen. We should be asking what's the evaluation process, and what do we need to do next.

Adam Shapiro: If you feel like your offering is expensive enough that this isn't going to be a one or two call close, your defined ask needs to be around enlarging the group of people, the sphere of influence that you have at your prospect's location to get greater buy-in to get them socializing what you have to offer, the problems you can solve, the goals that you could help them attain. Your defined ask needs to be around getting other people involved in your buying cycle, or selling cycle.

Jason Stone: Yeah, I'll take that a little bit further, you know Gartner does a lot of research on the buying cycle, and buyers. The average number of people involved in a sale has gone from 4.8, to 5.6, to 6.8, to now it's such a large group it's just six to 10 people. It's a large group of buyers. To Adam's point if your product or your solution is on the more expensive side, your sphere of influence needs to be widened, so make sure that's in your next steps. But then the other piece is I would say if you don't have a next step in your process defined, then you need a process. I would ask you back, what is your next step? What does your sales process say should be the next step? If that's not defined, I would start there, and define that.

Adam Shapiro: Yeah, let's jump into that just for a minute or two. Every company has a proven process. Every company says when I look at our best customer situations where our sale cycle, and our delivery cycle went well, we can define that. What does that look like from first initiation to closing and delivery? What went on at the prospect site involving us, or not involving us that led them to evaluate us, and ultimately choose us? We need to go back and figure out what that was, document it, and then offer it as a way forward with your prospects.

Moderator: **Paul in Boston says, "My manager wants me to hold off discussing our offerings with people who would ultimately implement and *use* the software until after the sale. I want to get them on our side during the sales process, and what do you think is the right approach?**

*Short answer:* *The best way to mitigate risk on your end is to involve the people who are going to be implementing your offering. Yeah, I agree with you. Bring them in during the conversation to get them on board.*

*The other piece to that I think about is this single threaded verse multi-threaded approach. If you're single threaded into an account, your chances for failure are significantly higher, and what I mean is that if there's no visibility on that person's decision, there's no sense of urgency, there's no accountability for whether it be a good decision or a bad decision, that person is operating in a vacuum*.

Full explanation:

Adam Shapiro: This is a tough one because your manager is saying something, and you don't know if they're necessarily right. Without knowing you or your manager the question I would ask is: Are you proud of the way your offerings are implemented with your customers, or is there something we're worried about? If you can't discuss the implementation of your offering with your prospects, there is a bigger issue at your company. Likely making sales and then having to go back and retrace it, your implementation people by screaming at their sales people, they're over promising on things that they can't deliver. This is a big problem area I see. As you move towards the higher end of total cost of ownership, there's much more risk on your end than on their end. But how do we mitigate that risk.

Adam Shapiro: Over and over again I hear from my prospect base, and my customer base, the way that sales go south late in a sales cycle, which means it was expensive in both time, money, and energy where an implementer raised their hand, and said, "We can't do that", for whatever reason. It may have been something that you could overcome, but they had already been down a line in their decision making process that either delayed, or put your offering in a waste basket.

Jason Stone: I agree. I think, again not to be the mouthpiece for Gartner, but another piece of information that was really interesting to me is that the average buyer spends 17 percent of the time researching and making decisions with the sales rep. Physically with the sales percent, 17 percent of the time. That means 83 percent of the time they're doing something else. I think you have to involve the people that are in this decision-making process, so that your time is best spent, and their time is best spent listening to that particular pitch or solution. Because 83 percent of the time they're doing something totally different, and they're influenced by something other than you. I think if you have the opportunity to do it it's extremely important to get everyone in the same room.

The other piece to that I think about is this single threaded verse multi-threaded approach. If you're single threaded into an account, your chances for failure are significantly higher, and what I mean is that if there's no visibility on that person's decision, there's no sense of urgency, there's no accountability for whether it be a good decision or a bad decision, that person is operating in a vacuum.

Jason Stone: One of the things we embrace at FRONTLINE is, when we have prospected into an account, we multi-thread it. We're touching a number of key players, and institutions so that our message percolates down to the proper person that we ultimately want to end up with. But now we have this visibility, and we have this notion that this something someone is trying to solve it within the company. It's no doubt on somebody's plate if they've taken the call, or if they're listing to a pitch. If they're doing it in a vacuum there's no accountability, and there's no negative impact if they choose not to implement your solution.

Adam Shapiro: Whenever I talk to my clients, and we talk about why they either lose to a name competitor or lose to no decision - in other words the status quo is maintained, and they decide not to change. We can zero in on three stories that the customer did not embrace:

1. There's the value story: What's my cost benefit analysis? What am I going to get back from this:
2. There's the usage story. How am I going to use what the seller says they have to offer us?
3. The third one is implementation. How are we going to get there? How once we have this thing, or this offering, how are we going to get to our usage, and our value?

If they can't understand how they're going to get there to get the implementation, there's a big chance they're not going to buy, or they're not going to buy from you.

Jason Stone: I think you're also playing a really dangerous game with percentages. If I tell a story to one person, and we've all heard about ‘The Telephone Game.’ They take that story and they go tell their key implementers, and they're going to miss a couple things-it's going to be a different story than you told them. Conversely if I tell the same story to 10 people at the same time, all 10 of them are hearing something different, but the collaboration to get to a single point of communication is what's key, and being able to deliver your message appropriately. I don't know the reason behind that ask, but I always encourage my folks to get as many key players in the room as possible.

Adam Shapiro: One last thing on this subject, if your prospect is willing to spend time with you discussing implementation that means they're spending time with you as opposed to other priorities which could be your competitors, so it becomes a qualifier. If they want to blow past the implementation discussion that could be a danger sign that you're not doing well on sales cycle. Getting time from your prospect to discuss the implementation further qualifies you as a winner on this opportunity.

Moderator: **David in Philly wants to know about pricing, "When should I give out pricing? How can I determine when someone is shopping for price, or genuinely interested in my solution?"**

*Short Answer:**If your prices are published but they haven’t found them yet, simply tell them. But if your pricing is more complex because of the variations in your solutions, the best approach is to ask for a little more time/information so you can put together a solution that addresess their specific challenge. Otherwise, they are asking you to give them a diagnosis before you've had a chance to really look at the problem.*

*“You got a lot of really good information right here, I appreciate your time. I think the next best step is for me to get with my implementation team, and see what we can come up with to drive to the outcomes you desire. Then we'll get back together, do a quick recap, and we'll go through some of what the solution looks like and the pricing.”*

Full explanation:

Jason Stone: That's an interesting question. If you're selling a transaction product, I have no issues with the prices being discussed on the first call. Often times in that realm that's what people are looking for, it's going to be a comparative shopping. Most of the time you have things like that on your website. So the pricing is pretty straight forward. As you get into a more complex sale, the idea of delivering a range versus just a solution pricing is probably the more appropriate approach. I would steer clear of it until you can actually design a scope of work that is fulfilling their outcome needs.

Jason Stone: For example- You go through a discovery call, and then you have some great information, and you think that this is a good fit, and you want to build a solution around it. If they ask your pricing right then and there, I would push back significantly, and I always use the doctor analogy. I've never walked into a doctor's office and been handed a pill and told, "Here, take that you'll be fine."

Your prospect is asking you to give them a diagnosis before you've had a chance to really look at the problem. “You got a lot of really good information right here, I appreciate your time. I think the next best step is for, let me get with my implementation team, and see what we can come up with to drive to the outcomes that you desire. Then we'll get back together, do a quick recap, and we'll go through some of what the solution looks like.”

Adam Shapiro: I like to be transparent and give a range: “The minimum amount that our customers pay to us is X, but we have customers that also implement our full suite and pay Y, and they are extremely happy with a great cost benefit analysis. I can't tell you right now where you would fall in that spectrum, but I can tell you it's not going to be less than X. It likely won't be more than Y.” (unless they're like the largest company you've ever talked to.)

Jason Stone: Often, if they continue to push for pricing it's an indicator that they're not generally interested. Again I wouldn't say that's across the board, but it's certainly an indicator and you’ve got to pay attention to it.

Moderator: **Jennifer in Chattanooga says she's worried that her contact is not high enough in the organization to actually make a decision, so she's wondering how she can get to the decision makers without making her contact really angry.**

*Short answer: It’s all about positioning. Don't look at it that you're going around somebody, but you're going with them. We're asking our prospect to do a lot. To take our messaging and our value prop and deliver that the right way, or ask and then put themselves at risk of being asked questions they don't know the answer to, and to really speak on our behalf. To position that, you could say: “I know this is not likely a single-threaded decision, as there's typically six to 10 people in an organization that makes a decision. Adam, I don't want to put you in a position to fail. You obviously believe there's value in this product, and I would love the opportunity to talk to the other key players, and deliver what you and I have spoken about, so you're not on the hot seat.”*

Full explanation:

Jason Stone: This is always an interesting one, and one of the faults we make is we look at it from an adversarial position. We're thinking that if we ask for something we're going to put ourselves in a point of friction with this particular person. I always say, don't look at it that you're going around somebody, but you're going with them. What I mean is that we're asking them to do a lot. To take our messaging and our value prop and deliver that the right way, or ask to then put themselves at risk of being questioned, being asked questions they don't know the answer to. To position that, say “I know this is not likely a single-threaded decision, as there's typically six to 10 people in an organization that make a decision. Adam, I don't want to put you in a position to fail - you obviously believe there's value in this product, and I would love the opportunity to talk to the other key players, and deliver what you and I have spoken of, so you're not on the hot seat. “

Jason Stone: This is to help them. If you've got somebody that's extremely interested in a product or service, and we're asking them to go to the next level internally for it, you will fail most of the time.

Adam Shapiro: The conversation needs to be practiced in your head first. It goes something like this: Let's say your prospect is a mid-level manager. You know that typically 99 percent of the time maybe 100 percent of the time you don't make a sale of your offering unless there are multiple people involved in the sales process, or the buying process like what Jason is describing. You'd ask Jordan. “Jordan we've had some great conversations around how you and others would use our product, what value you would get out of it? Who else besides yourself would be involved in selecting funding and implementing our offerings?” Then stop talking. Let them answer this question.

Jason Stone: One of the key things of what you just said is that you're valuing them in that statement. You’re including them in the process, not trying to get around them.

Adam Shapiro: They have to answer that question, because they know they can't sign the contract, create the PO, and then start implementing your offering - that's not their job, that's nobody's job. It's everybody's job. There's a lot of people there. Force them to answer that question. Once they do, ask “When can we setup a conference call, or a site visit if that's in your process, where all of us including Jordan can get together and discuss how we would bring value to your company?”

Adam Shapiro: Ask questions that may make your prospect uncomfortable. I want the questions to be high enough, or detailed enough that Jordan can't answer these questions alone. She's going to say “Oh, well I’m not sure about that. So-and-so makes those decisions.” In other words, we're treating Jordan as a proxy for Jordan's boss, or manager, or other person involved in selecting funding, and implementing. They're going to reveal that person to you. If they're unwilling to reveal it, ask why. Go back to your proven process, talking about how you know it takes a village, it takes multiple stakeholders, selection funding, and implementing in order to make your sale, in order for them to make

Moderator: **Jeremy in Long Island says that he gets the sense that he's being strung along by this prospect he said, "Well, how can I create some urgency around their evaluation of us without being too pushy?"**

**Short answer:** *You don't know why someone may not be getting back to you, and you don't want to assume. So go ahead and ask the question.* *We know from the Challenger sale that the most successful reps take control of their sales cycle. One of the ways you can take control of your sales cycle without being pushy is to ask the question. It may even be disarming for them.*

*“Hey, Jason, I'm sensing there's no urgency here. We've had great conversations around the following where it pertains to value, and how you would use it, and it seems like the cost of delay is X if you were to not move forward with us. What's going on? I'm not sensing any sense of urgency from you.” Leave it at that. Sometimes prospects are just so busy that it’s hard to get back to everyone. But that doesn't mean they are not interested, so keep in mind that doesn't mean that they're stringing you along.*

Full explanation:

Adam Shapiro: Companies buy your offering, Jeremy because they need to improve, increase, or decrease something. It's your job as a sales rep to figure out what that is. It's also your job along with marketing and other executives in your company to figure out typically what's your customer in that ideal client profile, or in that sweet spot in the market what they are trying to improve, increase or decrease. You need to remind your prospects of those things. If you've had a detailed discussion around value and usage then you have some cost benefit, you know what the cost of delay is. Whether it's in opportunities lost, or actual cost that they're incurring because they're not using you. You need to remind your prospects of these things as you move through your buying process and they move towards hopefully evaluating you.

Adam Shapiro: If they're stringing you along and you’re not sure where they stand, why not ask? It can be disarming. It could be that they have competing interests, it could be that they have four kids who have been sick for the last two weeks, and they just haven't been able to get around to you or to getting to their next step in their buying cycle. You don't know, and you don't want to assume, so go ahead and ask the question. “Hey, Jason, I'm sensing there's no urgency here. We've had great conversations around the following where it pertains to value, and how you would use it, and it seems like the cost of delay is the following if you were to not move forward with us. What's going on? I'm not sensing any sense of urgency from you. Leave it at that.

Jason Stone: Yeah, I think that that's a great tactic on the back end. My response would be a little more proactive in the sense of we talked about single threaded, I think again to get accountability, and visibility on the solution and the problem, so identifying key players initially, so that someone has someone to answer to they're not operating in the vacuum. The other piece is simply ask. One of the things you see with Adam and I and a lot of the discussions that we have is full transparency. I can tell you what my day looks like, and if I don't have time to answer an email from a prospect that I'm genuinely interested in, then I'm not going to answer it- I'm going to do it the next day. There's going to be a delay. But that doesn't mean I'm not interested, so keep in mind that doesn't mean that they're stringing you along.

Jason Stone: Simply being direct and asking is best, because it's sort of like dead weight to you. If you can get rid of it and move forward faster then that's what you need to do-but you need to be able to identify it, and dancing around it is not going to identify it. Be direct.

Adam Shapiro: We know from the Challenger sale that the most successful reps take control of their sale cycle. One of the ways you can take control of your sales cycle without being pushy is to ask the question. Too often we hide behind email, or hide behind letting the buyers do their thing without actually asking the tough questions. We can't be conflict avoiders. We have to be okay with some conflict and asking what's going on here, what's happening. They may see that as you being authentic wondering what's going on, and now they're going to open up to you about what's actually going on within their organization.

Moderator: **Next question is from Ken, he's written in from West Virginia and he said, "What should I say if a prospect tells me they are looking at two other vendors?"**

*Short answer: Don’t be put-off by this. At least they’re seriously evaluating you. Make sure you understand what is most important to them for this purchase. There are certainly requirement specs that they’ve established to make this selection, so ask for them. One of the things I like to always try to get my reps to do is say, “That's great. Most of our customers have gone through a similar process, and have chosen us. What does your process look like? Obviously if you guys are down this path and have chosen a few possible vendors, you've got criteria built around it. Are you able to share that criteria with me?”*

*Put it back in their court and be sure you act like you're not worried about the competition. “That's great, we go up against competition all the time and we typically win.”*

Full explanation:

Adam Shapiro: Well, congratulations they're in an evaluation, and at least you're top three. It is a danger signal though. That means they like two others as well as you. There's something they like about your two competitors you need to find out what it is, and how important it is to them. If you can get equal first, do it. Hey, we have that too, here's how we do it, and then get to how you’re different. But you do have to explore the differentiators, hopefully in terms of stories. When you ask the question, hey, what do you like about my competitors, and their answer is something you don't have, you need to figure out what the value is of that part of the competitor's offerings, and whether you agree that it would totally disqualify you if you were the buyer in this situation.

Adam Shapiro: If it doesn't matter, if it's something you think you can overcome easily, then we need to ask the usage and value questions around your differentiators that overcomes the things that they're perceiving as needed in their competitors. First things first though, get equal, and then get different.

Jason Stone: I'll be a little more cynical at first and say that that doesn't always mean there's two or three more competitors. However, if that is the truth and let's assume it is there's got to be a criteria that they're looking at, there's got to be a requirement specs that they're looking at to make this selection, so ask for it. One of the things I like to always try to get my people to do is say, “That's great. Most of our customers have gone through a similar process, and have chosen us. What does the process look like? Obviously if you guys are down this path and have chosen a few possible vendors, you've got criteria built around it. Are you able to share that criteria with me?”

Put it back in their court that you're not worried about that. “That's great, we go up against competition all the time and we typically win.”

Adam Shapiro: Yeah, so there's two situations this comes up, right. They looked at you, and then someone else said, hey, we should look at what else is out there in the market and they find two other companies who offer what you offer, and now it's a bake off between the three of you. That's okay. Because they spent time with you already, and now you have a rapport, you have a relationship you can work through those things. The other situation which also harken back to the previous question about pricing is they come to you, and say, hey we've been looking at two of your competitors can you give me a proposal as well, or pricing on your offering.

Adam Shapiro: This is where I want you to slow down and hold on. They need to be worthy of your proposal and your pricing, and what Jason is saying is they need to detail for you how they got there in the first place, so you can go through your discovery process to make sure that you're qualified for them and they're qualified for you. Slow it down at that point. If they're not willing to invest time in your relationship, and just want a proposal or a price because they've got two others, you're not going to win that deal anyway.

Jason Stone: Yeah, that was going to be my next statement, that deal is already dead. The biggest thing that I can say is, if you believe in your product or your service, then believe in it, and stick to the process, and don't get happy ears. Getting happy ears is one of the worst things you can possibly do.

Jason Stone: It's when you get really excited about getting a proposal and pricing out to someone who has requested it. It's of no context if it hasn't been built around value, if you haven't led to your solution versus with it. It goes back to the doctor analogy. I've never ever had been diagnosed before I walked in the door. I think it really is interesting to push back on that. If it was me who requested pricing or a proposal and the rep would come back to me and say I can't give you one until we discuss further, I would think that's bizarre. Don't we all jump at the opportunity to put a proposal or pricing in front of somebody? But that’s smart selling. One caveat after delivering the proposal, is that if it goes silent, it goes dark, don't continue to have happy ears on this thing. The absence of no does not mean yes.

Moderator: **Carly in Sacramento has one last question here. She said, “I need to get other important stakeholders involved in the next conversation in order to progress the deal, but I'm having a hard time doing that. What's the most effective way to gather those stakeholders into that next call?”**

*Short answer: The answer is simply – but not easy. You have to ask. A great question is this: “Who besides yourself are going to be involved in selecting, funding, and implementing what we have to offer?”* *Once you ask that question they have to answer. We know it can't be just that one person*. *Some of this builds around research, so I would go in prepared to ask, “I also noticed that Adam Shapiro was over the Southeast region for business enablement. Does he need to be involved in the next phone call?” The response will likely be, “Yeah, he probably does.”*

Full explanation:

Adam Shapiro: Well, if it was easy everybody would do it, Carly, we've all felt your pain. We've covered that somewhat earlier in this webinar. You got to ask. Again, let's go back to two things, select fund and implement, who are the people involved at your company who are going to be, besides yourself who are going to be involved in selecting, funding, and implementing what we have to offer? Once you ask that question they have to answer. We know it can't be just that one person. The other thing is to ask questions around goals, objectives, challenges, and issues. Which your prospect Carly can't answer, so they're a proxy - so they have to reveal who else they have to go to in order to work through their buying process, and your sales process, so let's get those. Lastly, use something like the FRONTLINE Selling platform, Linkedin, other things to figure out who we might want to involve in the sales cycle, and ask if that person should be involved.

Jason Stone: Yeah, I think that was the key that I was going to go to. Some of this builds around research, Carly, so I would go in prepared to ask. Also noticed that Adam Shapiro was over the Southeast region for business enablement does he need to be involved in the next phone call? Yeah, he probably does. There's one key player identified. Noting that you've identified another person in the organization shows that you've done some research. If you go in empty handed, so to speak, with “Is there anybody else we need to involve?”, someone typically is going to say NO.

Adam Shapiro: Carly, I also want you to gain more respect in the sale cycle. Like Jason said, as soon as you name somebody or describe your process that's happening successfully with other prospects you will get instant respect from your prospect for two reasons. You know your business, and you've done some research on their business. Many buyers these days have encountered too many sales people who don't take the time to understand their business, or do any research before calls. They smell it, and they can't stand us for it.

Jason Stone: Here’s one other approach. “Adam when we've worked with healthcare companies in the past, we've brought in the procurement manager and the revenue cycle manager. Is that something we would need to do in the next phase of this process?”

That shows that you've experienced the healthcare business before, but you've also considered how to help this process along, and you've identified some other key players. It shows ‘thoughtfulness’ on your part.