

# Misdirection, Magic and the curious dynamic of Q4

It's Q4, the end of the fiscal year for many, the quest for the last deals for vendors, the last budget spend for the buyers, and for all the need to become a priority; to appear, rather than to disappear.

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As some contracts are signed, and others vanish, I will draw a comparison with magic. The role of the magician is to make you believe what is true is false and what is false is true. This can confuse you to the point of leaving you questioning your own reality. To explore the magic of the Q4 dynamic, I call upon the four incredibly talented Horsemen from the movie 'Now you see me'.

*"Come in close. Closer. Because the more you think you see, the easier it'll be to fool you. You are looking, but what you're really doing is filtering, and interpreting teaching for meaning. My job? To take that most precious gift you give me, your attention, and use it against you."*

This is a horseman talking, but it could be anyone from the procurement department or even the company you are trying to sell to. At the likelihood of signing a contract, most sellers wear their happy ears the minute the buyer shows a strong interest in buying even when they know that this is the first step in a long and complicated adventure.

*“Ladies and gentlemen... For our next trick... We are going to rob a bank.”*

Selling is not just about getting a purchase order. It is about creating trust and setting the solid foundations for a long-term customer relationship. The more you think of “closing”, the less the customer will. You may have 1001 reasons to lose a deal, but there is only one you need to remember: you haven’t explored the unsaid.

*“Rule #1 of magic, always be the smartest guy in the room.”*

As with the first rule of negotiation, always be the person with the most information in the room. If you think the discovery is over with your sales stage in the CRM, you’re mistaken. Be curious, always challenge and ask the questions no one else dares to ask

*What other priorities are you working on? What are the vendors you are engaging with? What else are you doing besides talking with us to fix this issue? (...)*

*“I will be all over you like... like white on rice.”*

Asking smart, open-ended questions shows that you care. But, thinking that you are the only vendor your customers are dealing with is self-centered and naive. You may not be in direct competition with another company. This is Q4, the moment when getting access to the legal department, the procurement department, getting security approval, and access to the ultimate executive for a budget sign-off is like entering the lion's den. You are not alone, and everyone wants the same degree of attention. Everyone is competing against you for attention and budget allocation.

So what should you do?

*"I could care less about magicians in general. What I hate is people who exploit other people."*

*"Exploit them how?"*

*"By taking advantage of their weaknesses. Their need to believe in something that's unexplainable in order to make their lives more bearable."*

Be the number one priority. If you cannot respond to the most significant pain they need to solve, then you will be at the bottom of the list. If you align with the pain they need to solve. You are at the top of their list. It is as simple as that, and it is proportional to the allocated budget. Have you ever been in a position where someone says: all our lawyers are on holiday? It NEVER happens. What is happening is that all their lawyers are working on large, enormous, gigantic projects and have no time for your small piece of the budget.

*"Whatever you stand to make from this, I'll double it."*

*"I stand to make \$5 million."*

*"Am I flinching?"*

If you are solving a significant pain with a rational and emotional impact, the reason to act is vital. Suppose a large family's washing machine breaks. In that case, they will likely invest quickly in a new machine, a premium one, to avoid the expense over again. The more you fix, the more attention you will get from all the departments involved in the buying process.

But listen, this is only step one. You need to understand what these departments are going through. Be human, be friendly, and care about them as you would care about your champions. Most people only transfer documents between their legal department to their prospect legal department without reading them, understanding them, or challenging them. Be your customer advocate, and translate internally what you want to transfer externally.

Be respectful of time. As you are fighting for face time with your customer's department, they will prefer to deal with the people who are respectful of their time by maximizing efficiency. Don't schedule a 60-minute meeting if you only need 30, do not ask for a meeting if you can solve it with an email, these are basic principles.

*"Remember, if the oxygen mask comes down, put it on the lawyer first. Remember."*

*"Oh, yes. I always do. It's the lawyer first, then myself, and then the children."*

There you have it, the simple truth: there are 1001 reasons to tell you this deal is not going to go through this quarter. There is only one you can own so never overlook the details. Ask the questions that are in your head, to everyone, and repeatedly. Some people call them the 'tough' questions because they are too afraid to ask them:

What happens if we do not do business together before the end of the year?  
What are the consequences on your business? Who in the organization can say no to this project? Who/what could prevent us from working together? ...

Knowing the truth is always better than assuming or hoping. When you see a situation is going south, you can start crafting a plan to fix it. Hoping is never a strategy.

When a magician waves his hand and says, "This is where the magic is happening", the real trick is happening somewhere else. Misdirection.

*Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddy Ness and the founder of Uppercut First. Experienced in working for large companies such as Oracle, Computer Associates, and BMC, Caroline also lived in Silicon Valley for four years before moving to startups (Sprinklr, Datadog, Confluent) where she witnessed on the ground the benefits of a well-thought sales strategy. These are the foundations of UF: a structure that accompanies the European startups in their sales strategy by giving them an undeniable advantage in their go-to-market.*

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