



## The Fine Art of Drinking Wine from a Beer Glass *(or, Knowing What a Customer Wants)*

Say your company is offering a new line of artisanal beer glasses designed by local glass blowers. You've just stepped in front of the C-level team of a large wine and spirits firm to wow them with your product. You don't want to waste any time, so you launch right into your pitch. Three minutes into your presentation, the CEO stops you and says, "Wait. We're discontinuing our beer line this winter." Uh-oh. Wrong product, wrong time? Not necessarily. Listening more upfront, establishing the need before you advocate, or having an internal coach can avoid wasted time.

Let's re-imagine the scene. The first thing you do in front of that group is ask, "Tell me about how your various beverage lines are doing, and where you see opportunities for growth." The senior VP of marketing gives you a broad-brush picture of their successes and challenges, ending with their excitement about their new natural wine line. You then ask questions that get at how they are positioning the drink (hip and irreverent) and what audience they see as the most apt to buy it (millennials). During the conversation, they say they want to find some creative, original ways during the launch to distinguish their natural wine from the 57 other brands out there, maybe with a promotional product they offer online. "I love that you're looking for creative and quirky," you say. "Do you mean you'd like to find some outside-the-box way of piquing people's interest?" "Absolutely," the CEO says, and they all nod their heads in agreement. And now you've opened the door wide: How about drinking natural wine from an artisanal beer glass with your imprint?

The sales process should be a dance of discovery. It's a nuanced flow of questions and answers where you set the pace as you try to learn as much as you can about what their true business needs and sensibilities are. Then, and only then, do you seize on the perfect moment to advocate for your product or service, helping them see that yours is the perfect fit.



In brief, here's what you look like when you master the art of "sales conversation":

- First, you don't see yourself as a salesperson. See yourself as an internal partner who is more interested in their needs.
- Never lead with your solution unless the client is crunched for time and specifically asks you to cut to the chase. If that happens, go to a slightly broad bottom line, but immediately follow up with one or two key discovery questions that will help you quickly clarify their needs and open the door to future conversations.
- If they have more time, you pace the conversation in service of a quality discovery process.
- Last, when the time is right, you make that connection between need and offer. "So, you told me you're looking for creative, original marketing tools to help you launch your new natural wine line. You can be original with a new category of great natural wine glasses."

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