

Questions and Answers with Ellen Naylor, Author of *Win/Loss Analysis*



Question: Why did you write this book, *Win/Loss Analysis*?

Ellen: I wrote this book since every time I complete a Win/Loss project, and my client makes changes based on the analysis, they make more money. How many times do you have such a positive outcome every time you do something? More companies should be doing Win/Loss analysis. Readers can start up their own Win/Loss program by following the 12 steps detailed in the book.

Question: So what is Win/Loss analysis? How does it work?

Ellen: The idea behind Win/Loss is very simple. Yet businesses often hesitate to do it. Ask customers, "What happened?" after they have made their buying decision. You also ask customers who have decided on a competitor. After about 20 of these interviews, you see trends around your customer's decision-making process. You learn about the competition, get ideas for product development, even unintended uses of your product.

Question: How do I decide which customers to ask for Win/Loss?

Ellen: That's a great question. It's important to decide where you think you'll learn the most from listening to your customers. Think: "Where do I most need to improve sales results?"

- Is there a new competitor stealing market share?
- Is an old competitor winning against you more often these days?
- Are you introducing a new product, and want to improve market penetration?
- Do you want to improve your win rates in a certain industry segment?

Question: From your answer, it sounds like I would learn the most from interviewing lost business?

Ellen: While you learn from interviewing lost business, you learn just as much from interviewing customers who selected your product. You gain much more information about how your company is doing in areas like implementation, service and technical support when you interview wins—absent in lost interviews.

Also companies often think they know why they win deals. This can be another blind spot. Why you think you win isn't always the truth. You want customers to inform you, not just sales. Customers will

often tell you if it was a close call with another competitor; areas where you can improve; and areas where you are strong.

Question: If Win/Loss is so successful, then why don't more companies do it?

Ellen: The most common reasons are politics, arrogance and ignorance.

Politics: Sales feels threatened since they think Win/Loss is critiquing them. I think that was truer when I first starting doing Win/Loss in the 1980's, but now with the Internet and social media, learning from Win/Loss extends a lot further than just Sales.

Arrogance: Some companies think they know why they win and lose deals. They don't feel like they need to ask their customers or those who chose a competitor to find out. That is quite a major blind spot.

Ignorance: Some companies simply aren't aware of win loss analysis. While many companies ask their sales force why they won or lost deals, they don't think to ask their customers.

Question: What is the most compelling reason that people should be doing Win/Loss analysis?

Ellen: According to the experts who do research in Win/Loss, those who take action from a formal win loss program can expect win rates to improve business win rates by 15 to 30%. Since everyone's win rate differs, it is hard to translate this into an exact dollar amount: but it's more dollars.

Question: Most people say that Win/Loss just renders tactical changes at companies. Can you give me an example of a more strategic use of Win/Loss analysis?

Ellen: Generic examples of strategic benefits include: uncovering new business opportunities and partners; and knowledge of disruptive technology before it hits the market. More specifically, we used Win/Loss analysis to make a significant voice communications acquisition years ago when I was at Bell Atlantic, now a Verizon subsidiary. The details are described in chapter 19 of the *Win/Loss Analysis* book.

Question: What are the pros and cons of outsourcing the Win/Loss process?

Ellen: **Pros:** Customers and non-customers share much more information with an outside party than they do with companies directly. Even though they know the consultant will be sharing the results of interviews with the hiring company, there is something about speaking with a third party that encourages a lot more sharing.

Cons: Cost and no one knows your business like you do. Although in my years of Win/Loss, I have found that a detailed technical reason is seldom the reason that customers do or don't do business with your company. You need an interviewer who understands your industry, but more importantly understands why and how business decisions are made.

Question: In closing, do you have some tips about Win/Loss to share that you haven't already mentioned?

Ellen: Make/Win loss a collaborative venture with your sales force. However, don't let anyone on the sales team do Win/Loss interviews. Instead let them suggest questions to ask, and make their input mandatory. Win/Loss is to win retain more business, not to critique sales people.

Win/Loss interviews are not surveys. Win/Loss is a conversation. Listen for cues to probe more deeply in areas where you sense the customer knows more and is willing to share.

This final point bears repeating: Make changes based on what you learn. If you don't you're wasting time and losing more business.

Question: How can people contact you and get a copy of your book?

Ellen: My book, *Win/Loss Analysis: How to Capture and Keep the Business You Want* is available on Amazon, my website and through Smashwords distribution. There are hardback, paperback and e-book editions of the book. For a personally signed copy or for volume discounts, please contact me directly.

Less book-specific Q&A with the author [here](#).

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