



ACTIVATE

The Strong Next-Step Test

Is this actually progress?

Owner. Action. Timing. Purpose.

Suncoast Spark · Free Resource for B2B Account Executives

A calendar event is not automatically progress.

A strong next step is specific enough that both parties know who is doing what, when, and why it matters to the deal. Most next steps fail this check.



Owner

Who is responsible? Name the specific person — buyer-side or seller-side — who owns this action.



Action

What will they actually do? Vague verbs — "follow up," "connect," "circle back" — are not actions.



Timing

When will it happen? A specific date or deadline, not "soon" or "next week."



Purpose

Why is this step necessary? What deal condition does it address or advance?



Outcome

What should become clearer or more certain afterward? If nothing becomes more certain, the step may not be real progress.

📌 If you cannot name all five, the next step may not be real.

Weak vs. Strong Next Steps

The difference is not effort — it is specificity. Each of these is the same situation, expressed two ways.

	Weak	Strong
1	"Follow up next week."	"Maria will confirm whether Finance needs to participate before we schedule the business-case review Friday."
2	"Send proposal."	"Seller sends revised commercial scope Tuesday so procurement can confirm whether the structure fits their approval process."
3	"Schedule demo."	"Run a workflow-specific demo with Operations to validate whether the proposed process addresses the two issues identified in discovery."
4	"Check with IT."	"Buyer's IT lead reviews the integration requirements by Wednesday so both teams can determine whether technical scoping is necessary."

Notice that every strong version names an owner, describes a specific action, includes timing, and closes with a purpose clause — what becomes clearer as a result.

The Five-Question Test

Run this check after every buyer meeting before you update your CRM or commit to a next step.

- ☐ Is there a named owner?
- ☐ Is the action specific?
- ☐ Is timing explicit?
- ☐ Does the step address an important deal condition?
- ☐ Will something become more certain after it happens?

5 YES

Strong next step. Proceed.

3–4 YES

Incomplete — tighten it before you leave the meeting.

0–2 YES

Probably activity, not progress. Rethink the step.

Buyer Commitment Check

Who is doing the work?

After any meeting, map the actions by ownership. It takes thirty seconds and tells you something important about deal momentum.

What is the seller committing to?

List every action your side owns coming out of this meeting. Be honest about whether these actions advance the deal or simply keep it alive.

What is the buyer committing to?

List every action the buyer side owns. Named individuals, specific actions, explicit timing. If this list is empty, that is a signal.

If the seller owns every action

Ask whether the buyer is actually progressing the deal — or whether you are doing the work of a deal they haven't committed to.

On buyer effort

Buyer effort is not proof of a win. But zero buyer effort is meaningful evidence.



AE ON DEMAND

The next step should answer the most important question in the deal.

AE on Demand helps account executives identify the unresolved condition, recommend the strongest next move, and draft a clear owner / action / timing / purpose next step — inside ChatGPT or Claude.

Use it after any buyer meeting to pressure-test your next step before it goes into your CRM or your follow-up email.

Explore AE on Demand at aeondemand.com

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