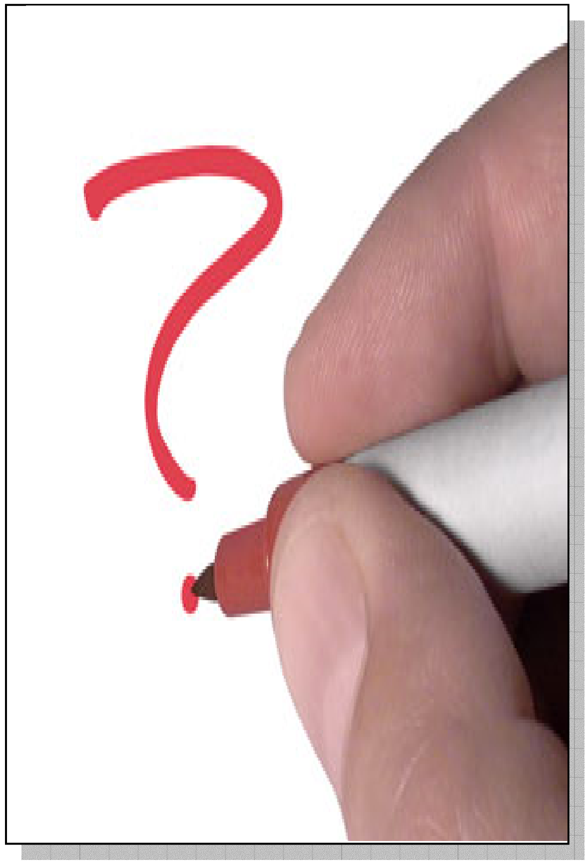
Real-World Questions
That Sell More *Now!*



Questioning Strategies to Close More Business

MANUAL FOR SALES PROFESSIONALS

Best@Selling

$79.00

Real-World Questions
That Sell More *Now!*

Manual for Sales Professionals

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Real-World Questions That Sell More *Now*!

I'm often asked, "How can I be more successful at selling?" Unfortunately, there is no one answer, but if you focus on your questioning strategy, I can promise you that you will see better results.

The next question is, "Where do I start?" I get many questions from sales professionals about questioning strategy and how they can implement their questioning strategy for the products and services they sell.

I wrote this manual for all the sales professionals who attended my presentations who asked for a manual so they could work on their questioning strategy. So if you're wondering how you can sell more, just ask better questions that guide your customers to understand why they should buy from you now. You can ask better questions when you follow the guidance in this manual,

Best wishes for your selling success.

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Real-World Questions That Sell More *Now*!

Introduction

There is a big myth about sales. Can you guess what it is? The myth has to do with what makes a great salesperson. Some people think that the best salespeople are the best talkers. You know who these people are. They're the ones who have the gift of gab. That myth is wrong.

The best salespeople, by far, are not the ones with the gift of gab. The great sales professionals are the ones who are great listeners. But, eventually even great listeners do have to talk, and when they do, they ask great questions of their prospects and customers. That's what this manual is all about. This manual contains the process of asking the questions of your prospects and customers to guide them to understand there is a need, it's an important one and they have to act and buy from you now.

Successful salespeople will tell you that asking questions is more important than talking about your product.

> Getting a good idea of what the customer thinks and learning his needs are crucial elements to sell successfully.

Questioning is an essential selling skill. Getting a good idea of what the customer thinks and learning his needs are crucial elements to sell successfully. The only way to do that is to develop an effective questioning strategy.

Remember you are not selling because of what you think; you are selling because your customer thinks that your product will meet a need, solve a problem or be what he wants.

Customers buy because of what's in it for them. They have their own reasons for buying, too. Only with questioning can you learn what customers' needs or wants are so you are in a better position to show them what will best satisfy their wants and needs. This manual will show you how to ask the best questions that help you sell more.

In this manual, the customer is often referred to as "the prospect." The assumption is that you are selling to someone who has not bought your products or services yet. That's why your questioning strategy is so important. Of course, the same questioning strategy would work with existing customers, too.

The Consultative Selling Process

What Do Consultants Do?

Consultants:

- Solve problems
- Have specific knowledge
- Are worth It

When you think of consultants, what comes to mind? Typically you will think about what they do and why they're hired. You would say that consultants are hired to solve problems. They're hired for specific reasons. The companies who hire them need the consultant's expertise because the company lacks that knowledge.

What skills do you think consultants need to have? When a customer has a problem, the consultant needs to listen effectively to hear the problem and demonstrate that he understands the problem. To be an effective listener, the consultant asks good questions that allow him to better understand the customer's problem.

When consultants are hired, they often charge considerable amounts of money for their time. Why? Because they can. When a company needs the consultant's expertise to solve a business problem, the company can't afford to waste time haggling over dollars. Delays can be very costly to businesses today.

There's a story about an engineer who is hired to solve an expensive operational problem in a factory. The equipment is shutting down unexpectedly causing considerable downtime. At $20,000 an hour, the value of the downtime is costly. The engineer is hired to fix the problem. He walks in and quickly looks at the machine. He takes a hammer out and taps the machine in a specific spot. The machine begins to function properly and the customer is delighted. Then the engineer sends his invoice. It's for $50,000. The customer balks at the amount.

Here's the conversation.

Customer: "How can you bill me $50,000 for just a few minutes of tapping."

Engineer: "Well, I'm sorry you feel that way. How much do you think I should have charged for the taps?"

Customer: "A lot less than that."

Engineer: "Here's a revised bill. I'll charge $1 for the taps. But I'll have to charge you $49,000 for knowing just exactly where to tap."

Customer: "OK. Now I understand."

That's how a consultative salesperson should think. A consultative salesperson sells because he can solve a problem. A consultative salesperson comes to the business meeting with more than just knowledge about his products and services. He has knowledge of business, the economy, the competition, current events and more information that might be useful to a customer with a problem.

Consultative Salespeople:

- Solve problems
- Have specific knowledge
- Worth it

Because the consultative sales professional has this knowledge and can solve business problems, the sales process looks a lot different than the selling process of other sales people.

With a consultative sales professional, the sales process doesn't start with a discussion of the price of his products or services. Yes, price is always part of the sales discussion. But, instead of being the first item discussed, it's not.

> If you are talking about price with prospects early in the sales process or sales call, you probably have an ineffective questioning strategy.

Price should not be the first thing you discuss with your prospects and customers. It should be the last thing you discuss right before your customer wants to buy.

Define Consultative Selling

Consultative selling is selling and acting like a consultant as you work with prospects and customers. The skills are the same. Consultative sales professionals are great listeners. They look and sound like they're listening. When they talk, they ask great questions that uncover customer problems and needs. Much like a consultant functions, the definition of consultative selling includes the skills necessary to be a consultant and how you present your products and services to a customer.

The key to consultative selling is that by listening and questioning you get the information you need to target a customer problem. You can now create the understanding that the problem is significant so the customer acts on the problem.

> Consultative Selling is asking questions and listening to the answers so you can identify customer needs *before* you present the best solution.

All too often, the salesperson is so excited about his product or service that he presents the solution too early in the sales process. The customer objects because he doesn't' understand why he should pay "so much" for the product. There just isn't a compelling need to buy. When the sales professional helps the prospect understand through his questions that there is a problem and it's a big problem, the prospect more easily sees that he has to act on the problem.

The ABCD Consultative Selling Process

What are the ABCD Steps?

The Consultative Selling Process:

- A Learning ABOUT the customer
- B What's BAD?
- C What are the CONSEQUENCES
- D Customer DESIRE

If you know the alphabet, then you know the consultative selling process.

A questions are *About* questions where you ask questions about your customer's business.

B questions are *Bad* questions. These really are good for your selling and not really "bad" questions. They're questions that ask about problems or needs or something that's bad for your customer's business success.

C questions are *Consequence* questions. These questions ask about the consequences of what is bad in the customer's business.

D questions are *Desire* questions. These questions ask about why a customer would want your product or service as a solution to his problems or needs.

How to Motivate Customers to Buy Through Questions

Asking About Questions Helps You Sell

You get better answers when you prepare About questions.

When you ask *About* questions, you will be asking questions about your customer's business. It's your job to ask good questions about your prospect's business that demonstrate you know what you're talking about and establish your credibly.

By learning about your prospect's business and by showing your knowledge about your prospect, it shows you have prepared. You've done some work. You care about them to do the extra work.

> It's your job to ask good questions about your prospect's business that demonstrate you know what you're talking about and establish your credibly.

Your prospects begin to trust you. This is good. When they trust you, they'll give you better answers, ones that are more complete and thoughtful. Prospects will be more open with you, too. That's a good thing because in sales, you need the information they provide.

You ask better questions when you are prepared.

You have to know about your prospect and his business before you can ask good questions. The knowledge you need is more than just the basics about the business, too. There's nothing worse that ruins your credibility than when you ask a poorly thought out question. If you are knowledgeable about a prospect's business you will ask different questions. Think about it. If you know that a prospect might use large quantities of your product, instead of asking three questions like:

- Do you use hydraulic oil?
- How much do you use?
- Which container sizes do you buy for your hydraulic oil?

You would instead ask just one question:

- Do you buy your hydraulic oil in bulk or drums?

Every question you avoid asking saves you time and makes you look prepared and professional.

Selling is about creating trust.

Prospects are busy today. They don't have time to teach you about their business during your sales call. You don't have time to waste during the meeting to ask questions that you could have found out the answers to before the sales call.

The Value of About Questions:

- Get better customer answers
- Quickly build trust
- Shorten the sales cycle
- Make persuasion easier

You can and should research each prospect before the meeting so you can plan the questions you ask about their business. By asking only those questions that you could not have found the answers to before the meeting, you show your customer that you respect his time. You look better prepared and smarter. You are more organized.

You shorten your sales cycle time, or the time it takes to close the sale, because your customer begins to trust someone who is better prepared. When a customer trusts you, the research shows that it's easier to persuade. Why? When someone trusts you they like you. We tend to comply to the requests of people we like. Think about yourself. Don't you comply with the requests of people you like? This compliance behavior is hardwired into human beings, so you might as well take advantage of it.

Prepared consultative sales professionals have more than the basic knowledge about their customers before the sales call.

Ask Bad Questions to Solve Problems

Customers need you when there is a problem or need.

Think about your customers and how they buy. Remember what consultants do. They solve problems. If a customer has no problems, he doesn't have to hire anyone to fix them because there's nothing to fix. When customers have no problems, they don't need to buy anything or do anything. They don't have needs or wants.

You would find yourself reacting similarly to your customers. When you wake up in the morning feeling great, do you say, "Gee, I feel great. I'm going to the doctor today." Of course you don't. What if you had a little cold? For some people that would be a reason to get medical attention. Not sales professionals.

Salespeople are very hard working, competitive people. They don't take time off if they have a few sniffles. They slug through it and eat a lot of cough drops to keep their cold at bay. With a few sniffles, you still would probably still not need to go to the doctor.

It's only when you feel bad—really bad—do you ever begin to think, "Gee, I might just have to think about going to the doctor." Customers are no different. They don't do anything unless there's a big enough problem.

That's why it's so important to build trust with customers. If customers trust you, they will feel comfortable disclosing any issues they're thinking about resolving. If prospects trust you, they will tell you about their problems. If not, they won't acknowledge that they have them.

They may not know they need you.

> Customers don't know what customers don't know. They often have no idea that they could be happier with a new supplier.

Just remember that some customers don't know what they don't know. If you ask them if they're happy with their current supplier, they often have no idea that they could be *happier* with a new supplier.

I worked with a trade association whose members sold promotional products. One item was a gift bag. A customer was buying thousands of these gift bags. He thought he had a great supplier. A new sales professional made a sales call. He asked about the bag and how it was being used. During the sales call, the sales professional learned that the bag was being carried in a way that made it difficult to use. The straps were too long. The customer really didn't like that feature, but didn't realize he could have it changed without additional cost.

The new sales professional told him that with the contacts he had in the business, he could arrange for the straps to be shortened and because of the volume involved it would not be at additional cost. Had the sales professional asked this customer, "Are you happy with your existing supplier?" The answer would have been "Yes." This customer didn't know what he didn't know.

You only get to sell something if your products and services solve that prospect's problem.

In your business, think about a prospect who has a problem that you cannot solve with your products or services. Do you get to sell that prospect anything? You may be thinking, "Sure I can. I'll send him a referral to someone I know." That might be right, but unless you're making money on the referral that you just gave, you haven't sold anything.

You can't put the goodwill you got from making that referral into your monthly utility bill or credit card bill. You only get paid when you make a sale. Your job is to find the problems that your prospects have *that you can solve with your products and services*.

That means you have to ask strategic questions that uncover problems you can solve with your products and services. When you uncover issues that you can address, you get to sell something that a customer actually needs. That's what successful selling is all about.

Ask Consequence Questions to Create Customer Action

Consequence questions produce the consequences of the problems that prospects have. These questions are not easy to ask, so it's especially important to prepare them before the sales call. They're very important questions to ask and too many salespeople either don't know to ask them or forget to ask them.

Motivate customers to do something

Unless a prospect is a brand new business and has no suppliers, you are calling on someone who is already using what you are selling. Prospects are often busy and find it challenging to make supplier changes. There has to be a reason for them to change. The consequences of their problems give them that reason. Consequences of problems are bad. They're negative. What motivates people to do something? There are two things that motivate people—pain or pleasure. Consequences are painful.

> Pain motivates more than pleasure.

Think about yourself. If you had a few sniffles, you probably wouldn't go to the doctor. Now what would you do if you had a 103 degree fever, your joints ached, you couldn't breathe and you thought you were going to die? Would you finally get yourself to the doctor? Probably. Unless the pain was so awful, you would just keep working.

People are motivated by pain and pleasure. They are more motivated by pain than pleasure. I asked Dr. Robert Cialdini, the author of *Influence: Science and Practice* about the relative percentages of motivation from pain or pleasure. He responded that both pain and pleasure motivate people to act. However, it's different percentages for different products. But, in all cases, pain motivates more than pleasure.

By asking *Consequence* questions, you force your prospect to acknowledge that there are consequences of his problems. Then he has to do something about it. Your *Consequence* questions motivate your customer to act because the problem is serious.

There are consequences of doing nothing

Unfortunately, many people are not risk takers. They're afraid to make decisions. Think about the people you work with and go to lunch with. Have you ever asked someone where they want to go to lunch? You might hear, "I don't know. Where do you want to go to lunch?" Unless someone makes the decision of where to go eat, the conversation goes nowhere quickly. Some people can't even decide where to spend $10 on lunch because they're afraid the food could be bad, the service could be slow or any other reason they might have.

Now imagine a prospect who is afraid to make a buying decision. You might hear, "I'll think about it." By thinking about it they avoid making a decision. Just remember, there are consequences of doing nothing. The problems they have are costing them something. It could be lost time, lost revenue, or lost profit. By asking *Consequence* questions your force the customer to acknowledge that there are consequences of the problem. They have to do something about it.

Ask Desire questions to build a closer tie to your solution

Desire questions tell you why a customer wants to buy from you. It tells you what's in it for them. These questions are the opposite of *Consequence* questions. The *Desire* questions are positive. Many salespeople don't ask these questions. As a result, they can't use the information they could have learned in their sales presentations.

It's like providing a purchasing road map for your prospect to follow

Before someone will do something, they have to see a reason to do it. By showing what's bad, or the consequence, you have created the reason to act. By seeing the consequences you magnify the pain and motivate them to act. When you learn why customers want your solution, you see what good can come out of the problem. By showing prospects that fixing the problem will make it better, you create desire for their acting and you motivate them to do something like buy.

Customers buy for their reasons, not yours.

When you do present your solution, you may think you know why your prospect is buying from you. Many sales professionals think prospects buy for pragmatic reasons only. They think the prospect will save money and has to buy. Maybe the prospect will avoid a cost by buying a product. Maybe the product purchase can increase revenues. These bottom line reasons may very well be true. Often they're not.

I've worked with many grizzled maintenance managers over the years. Many had years of experience and they often had major concerns with bottom line issues. When I asked them why they wanted to buy, I often heard things like, "My guys work really hard. If I could buy this and make their work easier, it would mean a lot to me."

Unless you ask the question, you won't know the real answer of why your prospects buy. When you ask a question about why your customer would want your product, you then can tie your product closer to that particular customer. Your customer begins to sell himself. You motivate your customer to buy. It's an easier sale.

You may think you know why, but you don't.

Most sales professionals think they know why their customer's buy and don't ask these *Desire* questions. As a result, they make bad assumptions and miss opportunities to create a stronger tie to their solution. Unless the customer has told you why he wants to buy your product, you can assume you don't know the real reason.

How to Implement the Consultative Selling Process

Before the Sales Call

Creating About Questions

Too many sales professionals think that selling is easy. They think they can begin their selling as they're sitting down in their chair in their prospect's office. That's not right. Selling starts well before you sit down in your prospect's office. One of the most important things you can do to be better prepared for your sales call is to learn about your prospect before the sales call.

> You can only ask a prospect a question if you could not find the information from another source before the meeting.

I have a rule for sales professionals. It's that you can only ask a question of your prospect if you cannot find the information from another source before the meeting. That rule means you have to prepare and gather information.

Learn the basics about the prospect's business

You know that when you ask good *About* questions, you'll make it easier to sell. Why wouldn't you want to make it easier for your selling to be successful? You can learn a lot about your prospect before the sales call.

You want to learn some basics about what that customer does. You would never ask the question, "So tell me, what do you do?" A prospect hearing that would know you didn't do an ounce of preparing for that sales call. You would lose credibility very quickly.

At a minimum, you should know what concerns the management in that type of industry. If you can find out if that particular company has concerns, that would be even better.

If you called on health care providers back in 1996, you needed to know that The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA was going to have an impact on the health care industry. Many health care providers were concerned about its impact on their businesses. Not being knowledgeable about HIPAA and businesses concerns with it would make you less credible as you spoke with prospects.

Learn the basics about the prospect..

> The more information you have before the meeting, the fewer questions you have to ask during the meeting.

If you're going to prepare yourself for a meeting with a prospect, you should know the job title of the person. Why is this minor detail so important? The more information you have before the meeting, the fewer questions you have to ask. A simple piece of information like job title also tells you a lot of information that is useful for selling.

A buyer has a different and much lower purchasing authority than a purchasing manager. A vice president of purchasing has greater buying authority. Your pricing strategy may change depending on the level of the person you are calling on.

Know who the key personnel are at that company. You should know who the president of the company is and the lead staff in the area you are making a call. If you are calling on purchasing, you should know who the vice president of purchasing is. If you're calling on the maintenance department, you should know the name of the vice president of maintenance.

You can find the information in many places.

Since consultative sales professionals are functioning like consultants, I hope you're still reading newspapers. Yes, some are moving to an electronic format. Whether your local paper is a thin piece of journalism, it still has local business that might be relevant to your customers. Business professionals must read the *Wall Street Journal* regularly. It's an excellent paper that gives you a solid understanding of business, companies, and the issues they face. Ignore it at your peril.

The *Wall Street Journal* is a great place to start so you are prepared with a general knowledge of business. It's only the beginning. Today even small companies have their own websites. Before any sales call, you should look at and study the website of your prospect. See what you can tell about their people there. What are their concerns?

If you are calling on a large company, they probably have posted their annual report on their website. Read it. You might find some strategic objectives that the company is addressing.

> The library is an excellent source of databases and business resources which have a wealth of prospecting knowledge. Often the information is free.

Another great strategy is to leverage your conversations with the telephone operators or assistants who answer the phone at your prospect's company. You could ask one or two different questions each time you called.

> When you ask the same question of different people you often learn about inconsistencies that are important to investigate.

You might inquire about number of employees. You might ask how long that person has been employed at the company. You could even ask the same question of many different people to see if you get the same answer. This "triangulation" strategy gets you prepared with good solid information that you can use to sell.

Don't forget, you might even talk with some of your existing customers to learn some information about prospects. The time you spend preparing for the sales call will be time well spent. You will be more confident. You will ask better questions. You will get better results.

Plan your questioning strategy

The time to plan what questions you are going to ask is before the sales call. Why? You want to be able to solve a prospect's problems or address a prospect's needs. Depending on what you believe the situation is at that particular prospect, you'll want to address different issues.

The questions you ask will depend on the issues you want to address. As you develop your questioning strategy and how to guide your customer to understand he has a need for your products, think about what you and your products and services can do for a prospect to help reduce a cost, avoid a cost or increase revenue. Ask yourself:

- How can I help prospects better market their products?
- What can I do to help prospects familiarize themselves more quickly with our product or service?
- What can I do to make my prospect's life easier?
- What can I do to make my prospect more profitable?

Decide what information you need to get during the sales call

It's not enough preparation for your sales call just to gather information about your customer and his industry. You can also plan the information you need to gather during the sales call. While planning the information you want to get using your *About* questions, you may even find that some of the information is available to you from other sources. That way you save some time in the sales call by not having to ask that question.

> Never assume you are talking with the sole decision maker.

Certainly one of the questions you are going to want to ask is how they are going to make their buying decision. Never assume that you are talking with the sole decision maker. The question to ask is not, "Are you the one who makes the decision to buy?" If you ask that question of a male, you will never have him telling you effectively that he doesn't have the power or authority to make that buying decision.

Instead, frame your question differently so you make it easier for a male to give you an honest answer. Assume the decision is going to be made by more than one person. Ask your prospect, "Who along with you will be making the decision to buy?"

Information to gather during the sales call:

- How they will decide
- Who are the decision makers
- Company goals

While you do your research before the sales call, you might find that some of the information you gathered is dated or incorrect. You'll want confirmation on how they are operating and what marketplace they're targeting. It's often a good idea to plan to get confirmation of important information at the sales call. You might want to confirm company goals and objectives.

It's a good idea to know who your competition is. Often that gives you an indication of the general price that they're paying for the products they're buying. It will give you a rough idea of where you need to be with your pricing so you can be competitive.

Remember, a low price doesn't have to be the starting point for your offering. If you're selling on value and what you bring to a customer, you should start by understanding that prospects should be paying for the value you bring them. Salespeople who get business only because of price are often losing business just because of price. It's a hard way to maintain a business and be successful.

During the Sales Call

How to Be Ready to Talk about Business

The power of small talk

Many sales professionals think that they can just dive into the sales call and start talking about business. Yes, for some customers and prospects this is an effective strategy. For others, it's too direct and it makes people uncomfortable. Instead, great salespeople intuitively know who they should be making small talk with and who they should not. If you want more information on this topic, get the Secrets of Persuasion audio CD (www.BestatSelling.com) to learn more about which styles like the direct approach.

Small talk is like salt and pepper

For some salespeople they make the mistake of thinking that small talk is selling. No, it's not. Schmoozing is not selling. Small talk is a strategy that's used in conversation for short periods of time to transition from a greeting to business. Think of it like salt and pepper. You wouldn't want to eat an entire meal from the salt shaker, would you? You probably would reject a mean from the pepper mill. So your job as the sales professional is to engage in small talk briefly and then transition into your business discussion.

> Small talk is not selling. It's just the transition from the greeting to the business discussion.

What small talk can I use?

If a salesperson knows what he can talk about, he'll be more comfortable with small talk. What is important is that some topics should be off limits. Especially when you are just becoming acquainted with a prospect, it's better to err on the side of caution. Stay away from any topics that could become heated. Politics and religion immediately come to mind.

If the person looks controlled and has few facial expressions, doesn't use hands to talk, and has a monotone voice, stick to facts and information when you make small talk. You could talk about:

- Their company
- The industry
- The economy
- The weather

If the person talks with far more facial expressions, uses hands when he speaks and has a more varied tone of voice, you can talk about more people related or personal topics. Just be sure you don't get too personal too soon. You could talk about:

- How long they've had this job
- How long they've been at their company
- Where they are from
- How did they get this job

Get down to business

> It's your job to take control of the sales call and transition from small talk to business.

The switch to business comes when the salesperson guides the conversation to business. Don't wait until the prospect changes the topic. It might just happen that the prospect is using the time with you as a break in his day and the casual conversation takes the entire time and you never get down to business. Your job in sales is to guide the conversation and make sure you limit the small talk to just a few minutes. Then it's time to talk business. Remember, you can only ask questions for information that you could not find from other sources before the meeting.

Avoid the trap

> If too many customers are telling you, "So tell me what you've got" it means you're doing too much schmoozing and not enough selling.

Sometimes a prospect will say to you, "So tell me what you've got." Some inexperienced salespeople fall for this trap. It's not meant to trick salespeople. What happens is the prospect just wants to get right down to business. Instead of the sales professional making that transition with a planned question, the prospect beat them to it. The salesperson hears the request for a presentation of his product or service. That's not what this request is! When a customer says, "So tell me what you've got" he is simply telling you that he's ready to get down to business. Remember, it's your job to guide the flow of the sales call. If too many customers are telling you, "So tell me what you've got" it means you're doing too much schmoozing and not enough selling. Note that schmoozing is the idle conversation during business that some salespeople consider to be selling, It's not.

When a customer says, "So tell me what you've got" your only response is "Well, before I tell you about my products, can I ask you a few questions?" Then you had better be prepared with your Pinball Question.

What is your Pinball Question?

Some young sales professionals don't know what a game of pinball is. A picture of a pinball machine is on the right. This is a game that was played widely at college campuses during the 70s. The object was of pinball was to launch a steel ball in the game and it would hit flippers and bells and other targets. Each time the player hit a target with the ball, he could earn points. The object of the game was to keep the ball in play as long as possible and get as many points as possible. A Pinball question in sales has a similar objective.

A pinball question is:

- Non coercive
- Thoughtful: Requires some thought by the customer
- Easy to answer

The object of a Pinball question is to engage the prospect in conversation early in the sale call. When the customer is talking, he feels more relaxed and will give you more information. The only way a sales professional is going to get useful selling information is if the customer is talking, not the salesperson. The

Pinball question is a specific question that starts the sales call on a strong foundation. It sets the direction for the meeting. It begins the business conversation.

A Pinball question is a question that a sales professional asks close to the beginning of the sales call. It's a question that's designed to get your customer talking about his business. You may be thinking about starting your sales call with, "If I could save you some money would you be interested?" That is a coercive question that is not appropriate for a Pinball question.

You may think a question about a sports team could be considered a Pinball question. It is not. "How about them Cowboys, Steelers, or any other professional or amateur team?" is not really asking about your customer's business. Unless you are calling on a sports team, you are not asking a thoughtful question about your customer's business when you are talking about sports.

Make sure when you ask this first question that your prospect is able to answer it. It would be embarrassing to you and maybe to him if he said, "I'm not sure I understand what you're asking." You don't want to stump your customer early in the sales process when he doesn't know you very well.

You may be thinking about your own Pinball question. If you have some ideas about your question, you can now critique its effectiveness.

Making Questions More Effective

Good Pinball questions get the customer actively engaged in the sales call. When prospects respond to good Pinball questions, they are giving you information about their business. The information you learn helps give you guidance in the sales call about what is important to your prospect. To improve your Pinball question, make sure it's open-ended or cannot be answered by "yes" or "no" or just a few words. Open-ended questions are like essay questions that require longer answers. They are phrased to draw out a wide range of responses on a broad topic. They attempt to involve the customer by asking for knowledge of a subject or asking for an opinion about a topic. They help the customer speak freely. They usually require a lengthy answer.

Effective Pinball Questions are:

- Broad (Open-ended)
- 10 words or less
- Including the word 'You'
- Stated in the positive
- Encourage free business conversation

To make it easier for your prospect to answer with more than just a few words, think about starting your question with the words "how" or "why." It's almost impossible to answer a question that starts with "how" or "why" with just a few words. Remember, you want your customer doing most of the talking at the beginning of the sales call.

Think about starting your question with the words "how" or "why." It's almost impossible to answer a question that starts with "how" or "why" with just a few words.

You want your Pinball question to have as few words in it as possible. Ten words or less is a good target to hit. Why? Most sentences are 14 to 20 words. The more words you have in a sentence, the more difficult it is to understand. Your job is to make it easier, not harder for your prospect to answer. Limit the number of words in your Pinball question. If you can get the number of words down to 8 words, that is great.

If you state your Pinball question positively it's also easier to understand. "Don't you think" is an example of a question that's phrased negatively. Do you think is an example of a question that's stated positively. Why is it easier to understand positive questions? It's how your brain works.

Here's a quick example. Which statement is easier for you to understand?

Selling is easy.
Selling is not hard.

Most people would say they immediately understand what "Selling is easy" means. It took a few more seconds to get to understand what "Selling is not hard" means. Why is that?

> You should always speak positively, instead of negatively, especially in sales. It's easier for the customer to listen and understand what you're saying. .

It's because to understand what "Selling is not hard" means, your brain first has to comprehend what "Selling is hard" means.

Then, the next step is to understand what "not hard" means. It's a two step process. It is more inefficient for your brain. It's more work and it's harder to understand.

That's why you should always speak positively, instead of negatively, especially in sales. It's easier for the customer to listen and understand what you're saying. Remember that one of the listening statistics is that people remember 30% of what is said and a week later remember 10%. It is essential in sales to make it easier for your customers to listen to you! You do when you speak positively.

Pinball Question examples

Here are some examples of Pinball questions.

- How has your business management changed?
- How do you select your (product you sell) supplier?
- What's changed for you since we've last met?
- How satisfied are you with your current operation?
- What do you want to do different this year?
- How do you select the suppliers you work with?
- What's the secret of your success here?
- How does (the product you sell) purchasing impact the work you do?

About questions

After you ask your Pinball question, you'll find that the sales conversation has begun. Based on the answers you hear, you'll follow up with other questions about your prospect's business. The *About* questions you ask can be different depending on the types of industries and companies you are making sales calls.

There are many *About* questions you can ask. They range from the size of a plant to the range of experience a group might have. Remember, if you can find out the information from other sources, you won't be asking that question. You might confirm it, but it wouldn't be a specific question.

Other questions you could ask about your prospects business could be:

- Who is the competition?
- How long have they been doing business with their current supplier?
- What are your staff or customer demographics (gender, job title, age)?
- What's most important for this group, job, meeting, etc.?
- What types of products were used previously?
- What was successful for them?
- What didn't work?
- What is your budget?
- How long has this person been in his job?
- What area (location) will the bids be for?
- When does the buyer order product?
- What is the range of purchasing area?
- What are the dangers in any of the jobs?
- How does the prospect do what he does?
- When and where does the prospect work?
- Why the prospect is doing the work?
- What is the fiscal year?
- Who the prospect is working with?
- Can you help the prospect do it better?
- Who are the prospect's customers?
- What's changed for you since we've last talked?

In addition to the above *About* questions, make sure in each prospecting call you have identified your 3 things. These are 3 primary pieces of information that tell you quickly that the prospect is a good one for you or not.

> Identify YOUR 3 primary pieces of information that tell you early in the sales process that your prospect is really a prospect.

If you were in the oil business selling petroleum products, a customer buying in drums and not bulk might have been a poor prospect for you. One of your 3 things to ask would be, "Do you use drums or bulk?" You may need minimum purchasing quantities for you to take your valuable selling time and spend it face-to-face with a prospect. If that is the case, you would ask, "About how many gallons do you order each month?" Perhaps a plant has to operate a certain number of hours for it to be a candidate for your engineering service. The question to ask is, "How many hours a day does your plant operate?"

> Too many salespeople let the sales process move along and they do a poor job of qualifying their prospects.

Each product is different and has different questions to quickly determine what a viable prospect looks like. Just make sure you've written your questions so you make sure you ask them the very first time you're in front of your prospect. Why? Too many salespeople let the sales process move along and they do a poor job of qualifying their prospects. Then, months pass and suddenly they realize that they've wasted a lot of time on a prospect who won't be buying this year. The second best thing that can happen to you is that you learn it's time to move on from a prospect. Of course, the best thing is that a prospect decides to buy!

Make About questions easier to answer

One technique to help your customer answer your questions is to frame them. A framed question has a statement of fact before the question. Framing adds depth and an awareness of the business context of the question. Here's an example of a framed question:

> Most of our customers find that on time delivery is an issue for them. How are deliveries meeting your expectations?

What About questions tell you

When you have prepared and asked your *About* questions, you will learn a lot about your prospect's business. Since you have a good idea of the types of customers who need or want your products and services, you are beginning to make some assumptions about the prospect you're talking with. You are learning that this prospect has the potential to be a good customer or you're learning that this prospect, despite your thinking before the sales call, is not going to be a good customer.

> You know you have a viable prospect when you know:
>
> ◇ The Decision maker(s)
>
> ◇ The Decision making process
>
> ◇ When the buying decision will be made
>
> ◇ The roles of all decision makers

During your first meeting with your prospect, you should make sure that as a result of asking *About* questions that you can made the decision as to whether this prospect deserves more of your selling time or not. If this prospect is viable and has potential to buy, make sure you have also identified all decision makers involved in decision making. Learn what their decision making process looks like and determine when the decision to buy is going to be made. Make sure you have job titles and understand the roles the people have who are involved in decision making. When you have all that information you can honestly determine if that prospect is a viable prospect or not.

Asking (good) Bad Questions

> Once you uncover what's making it difficult for your prospect to achieve his personal or business objectives and find issues that are important to address, you have created a reason to buy something to address the need.

Now that you know about your prospect's business by asking effective *About* questions, you can move the sales process forward by asking questions about your prospect's problems, needs or wants. Once you uncover what is making it difficult for your prospect to achieve his personal or business objectives and find issues that are important to address, you have created a reason to buy something to address the need.

Look for problems or improvement

> Many customers are aware that they have problems, but may not be aware that there are solutions to their problems.

As you meet with different prospects, you can be looking at your prospect's business and what is causing problems. Many customers are aware that they have problems, but may not be aware that there are solutions to their problems. Even when a prospect thinks there are no problems or he has no problems, in business today there are many areas that can be improved. That's another area to consider. With more and more professionals doing more work with fewer resources, there is also an opportunity to sell something if you can make your prospect's work easier for him.

You probably have some ideas about what problems might be issues for different prospects if you have a little experience in sales. If not, talk with more experienced sales professionals about the problems you can solve with your products and services. Your educated guess is a good beginning to create your *Bad* questions.

Instead of using the word "problem" in your questions, use the word "barrier" or "obstacle." The word "problem" has negative associations to it and might make it difficult for the prospect to answer truthfully. After all, if you have just met a prospect, he may feel uncomfortable telling you about his problems in business. Furthermore, some people believe they are getting paid not to have problems, so why would they admit that they have them? If they think they're effective doing their job, then they would not have any problems.

Using the word "difficult" in your question is another way to uncover areas that are problems for customers. Asking, "Is it difficult for you to…?" gives the prospect an easier way to discuss areas that might be improved.

Find problems you can solve

> You only get to sell and make some money if you uncover problems you *can* solve.

When you uncover customer problems you are on your way to being able to sell something to resolve the problem. What happens when you uncover a problem that you can't solve with your products or services? You've got a problem. Some sales professionals think that it's still acceptable to find problems they can't solve. I disagree. You only get to sell something and make some money if you uncover problems you *can* solve. The problems you can't solve give you an opportunity to refer business to someone else. Unless you're getting paid for referrals, you miss an opportunity to sell something.

The purpose of asking *Bad* questions is to uncover the problems you can solve. When you do, you get to sell something. If you don't, you have to move on because there's no selling objective left for you to be productive at that account.

Features and Benefits direct you to your Bad questions

Most sales professionals are familiar with features and benefits. You will begin to write the *Bad* questions you will be asking when you start with an understanding of your product's features and benefits. When you understand them, this will lead you to the problems your products can solve. We'll start by examining the features and benefits of a binder that costs $1.00 more than other binders. The reason for the price premium is that this binder has a clear panel on the spine of the binder which can be used to identify the contents of the binder.

Features are characteristics of your products and services. Benefits are what those features do for your customers. For example, if you sold binders, there could be many features of your binder.

Here is a list of features for the binder pictured on the left.

- The binder has a clear panel on the spine.
- The binder has 3 rings.
- The binder is plastic coated.
- The binder is blue.

- The binder is 10.5” x 12.”
- The binder has an inside pocket.
- The binder is made in the U.S.

All these features may or may not interest a particular prospect. All too often, salespeople start talking about the features of their products without realizing that many prospects don’t care about the features, or at least the ones that the salesperson is mentioning. The only things that interests prospects are the benefits—what the features do for them. Customers also only care about the specific benefits they need. Salespeople should remember to always present features with benefits because customers buy benefits, not features.

Salespeople should remember to always present features with benefits because customers buy benefits, not features.

Sometimes salespeople start their feature discussion because they are looking for a sign from the prospect for interest in any of the features. It’s as if the salesperson has no sales call plan and is looking to the customer to provide him with a selling plan. That’s not acceptable. It’s the salesperson’s job to come prepared with a sales call strategy.

It certainly doesn’t start by dumping features on the prospect. It lacks a strategic focus to randomly present features hoping that your customer might like a particular feature. A better strategy starts with identifying the problems a prospect could be facing. That’s why you have to know the features and benefits of your products and services. Your features and benefits lead you to the problems you can solve.

Here are the features tied with the benefits for the binder with the clear panel on the spine:

Feature	Benefit
The binder has a clear panel on the spine	…which means that you can identify the binder and quickly find it when you need it.
The binder has 3 rings	…which means it will firmly hold papers and prevent paper damage.
The binder is plastic coated	…which means it won't get dirty so there is no maintenance …which means that it will look professional for many years and you won't have to replace it.
The binder is blue.	…which means it matches your corporate colors and supports your company image.
The binder is 10.5" x 12."	..which means it fits exactly on your shelves and provides the most storage.
The binder has an inside pocket.	…which means you can store all materials for a program together and not lose materials that are part of a program.
The binder is manufactured in the US.	…which means you can support your company's mission of buying American made products.

Note that a feature can have more than one benefit.

Find problems you can solve

Now ask yourself, what problems the product could solve because of the features and benefits it has.

The chart below highlights some of the problems that our binder could solve. If a prospect had any of these problems, he might need to purchase the binder. If these problems are important to that prospect, he would even be open to pay a little bit more for this binder because it has the features and benefits that would help him solve his problems.

Feature	Benefit	Problem or Concern
The binder has a clear panel on the spine	…which means that you can identify the binder and quickly find it when you need it.	It's difficult to find binders quickly when you have to work on a particular project
The binder has 3 rings	…which means it will firmly hold papers and prevent paper damage.	It's difficult to keep papers neat and organized for long periods of time without damage
The binder is plastic coated	…which means it won't get dirty and will look professional for many years and you won't have to replace it.	It's difficult to keep binders clean because so many people are using them and they get dirty quickly
The binder is blue.	…which means it matches your corporate colors and supports your company image.	A company needs to have all materials meet corporate image standards

Feature	Benefit	Problem or Concern
The binder is 10.5” x 12.0”	...which means it fits exactly on your shelves and provides the most storage.	Need to store as many binders on one shelf as possible because of limited storage
The binder has an inside pocket.	…which means you can store all materials for a program together and not lose materials that are part of a program.	Many departments access the materials and it’s difficult to avoid losing materials
The binder is manufactured in the US.	…which means you can support your company’s mission of buying American made products.	Need to source at least 90 percent of purchases from the United States

You can build a similar table for your products and services. You should build this table since it’s the only way you can be sure to capture all the problems or concerns you could address by selling your products. When you call on a prospect, part of your call strategy is to use your judgment and plan to discuss areas that might be problems for that prospect. Those problems would come from your list of problems you could address.

Now that you know which problems your products or services can solve, you can incorporate the problems you’ve identified into your sales call planning. Ask yourself before each sales call which problems might be ones you want to discuss in the meeting to determine if they are in fact issues for your prospect.

Build your own questioning table

Feature	Benefit	Problem or Concern

Questions about what's Bad

There are many questions you can ask about the problems and obstacles your prospect is facing. Here are a few *Bad* questions:

- How satisfied are you with your present system?
- What's preventing you from achieving your goals?
- What process is taking longer than you like?
- What do you need to track?
- What can we move faster for you?
- What information is difficult to access?
- What areas are creating errors?
- What rework do you have?
- What is being done manually that can be automated?
- What makes it difficult for you to...?
- How satisfied are you with your current program?
- What's preventing you from achieving your safety goals?
- Is it or What makes it difficult for you to (do a specific task)?
- Is it challenging for you to increase customer satisfaction?
- Are you finding it difficult to increase employee retention?
- What is making it difficult to sell more products?

Some template *Bad* questions that can be applied to selling a variety of products and services are:

- What makes it difficult for you to...?
- What's preventing you from...?
- How easy is it for you to...?

Avoid presenting your product too soon

Prepare the *Bad* questions you plan to ask before the sales call. You might find that during the sales call there are other areas that you can and will address. The planning is simply your road map for the call. When you have prepared questions, it will help you stay on track and avoid presenting your product too soon. Presenting your product too soon is a big mistake for many sales professionals.

Here's why asking *Bad* questions helps you avoid the trap of presenting your product or service too soon. You may be excited about your products. I certainly hope you are. It's very difficult to be successful if you don't really enjoy what you do and what you sell. What happens to many salespeople is that when they hear the first sign of interest from a prospect, they interpret that interest as the signal to present a solution. They present their product and then learn that the customer wasn't all that enthusiastic about paying for it. At the time it sounded good, but once the details came to light—notably the price—the buying decision came to a screeching halt.

> When you have prepared questions, it will help you stay on track and avoid presenting your product too soon.

When you uncover customer problems and find at least 3 that your prospect agrees are important, then you have enough information to present your products and services *and not before.* It's only when you find a few problems that are important that it's more likely that a prospect is going to actually do something—like buy a product—to address the problem. Customers having problems is a good thing for salespeople. Having really big problems is a better thing. It's the salesperson's job to find the big problems that a

> When you uncover customer problems and find at least 3 that your prospect agrees are important, then you have enough information to present your products and services –and *not before.*

prospect is experiencing so it's more likely the prospect will buy.

Make sure you have identified important problems.

Let's say you're in a sales call and talking with a very important prospect. You ask your prospect *About* questions which leads you to your *Bad* questions. You find 3 problems that are obstacles to their business success. The first problem is a production problem. When you ask your prospect, the buyer, if the production problem is important to him, he says it's not. He might say, "I'm in purchasing and while it's good for the company to have higher production rates, I'm rated on the costs of the products I buy, not on the amount of production in the plant." Now imagine you launched your product presentation based on your product solving the company's production problems. Your buyer would certainly not care to buy. You haven't solved *his* problem.

> When a problem is important to that person, they have a reason to buy something to fix the problem.

When you're asking *Bad* questions, the next step when you uncover a problem is to clarify that the problem is important to that person. When a problem is important to that person, they have a reason to buy something to fix the problem. The question to ask is as simple as, "Is that issue important to you to address?" If you hear "no" be sure to find out why. That information can also help you find the person who does care about the problem—and make a sale.

Your *Bad* questions create an awareness of discomfort for your prospects. Now you want them to act on that discomfort.

Asking Consequence Questions

Now that your prospect is aware that there is a problem, your job is to create the action to do something about the problem. Making a change and changing suppliers is a hassle. Most people want to avoid hassles. Through your *Consequence* questions, you can create awareness in your prospects that there is a need to address, it's an important need, and they have to act now.

What are Consequence questions

Consequence questions are difficult questions to ask. You'll see why as I should you how to create them. Consequence questions answer what happens as a result of the problems. The answer to a *Consequence* question is the consequence. When you have a problem, then ask a *Consequence* question, the answer to the *Consequence* question is the consequence of the problem.

Why consequence questions are important

If you tell a customer that he will have a problem with decreased productivity or decreased profits, you're not letting the customer experience his pain. Pain is a very powerful motivator. When a customer tells you the consequences of his problems, by answering the *Consequence* questions, then it's his "data." Customers never argue with their own data! The next time you feel compelled to tell a customer that his problem has big consequences, turn it around. Ask the question so he answers with the consequences.

> By recognizing the consequences of the problem, you are showing the prospect that it is worth the hassle to make the change.

When a customer realizes that there are consequences of his problems, he is more like to act because he now sees that the problem is serious. Remember, change is a hassle. You are asking a prospect to make a change when you are asking him to change suppliers or buy something new. By recognizing the consequences of the problem you are showing the prospect that the hassle of making a change is worth it. By discussing the consequences of the problems, you are also showing the prospect that if he chooses to do nothing and *not* change, that there are consequences. It is the salesperson's job to motivate the prospect to do something about his problem and buy something.

How to write Consequence questions

In order to write *Consequence* questions, it's almost like playing the television game show *Jeopardy!*. You probably know the show. It's the game show where you earn money when your correct answers are in the form of a question. In sales, the correct answer is the consequence of your prospect's problem. With *Consequence* questions, you are asking the question to your prospect and he's telling you the consequence of his problem. There's value in your customer telling you the consequence, instead of you telling the consequence to your prospect.

SITUATION: An office with lots of binders where you need fast access

- CONSEQUENCES: You could spend a lot of time looking for just the right workbook you need.

- QUESTION: How does looking for binders affect your productivity?

To start writing your *Consequence* questions, ask yourself what is the ideal situation for your feature or benefit to be needed. In the case of the binder with the clear panel on the spine, the ideal situation for that type of binder is an office where there are lots of binders being used. A law office or an engineering company might have lots of reference binders that would have to be easily and quickly identified so they can be used.

Now ask yourself what would happen if that ideal situation did not have the features and benefits of your product. You are asking for the consequence. Here's what would happen in the case of a law office with lots of binders that were unidentified because there is no panel to identify them. It would take the employee lots of time to find just the right binder he needed so he could do his work. To write the *Consequence* question, ask the question so the answer is the consequence. The question would be, "How does looking for binders affect your productivity?

Consequence questions motivate your customers to buy.

Now do you see why it's important to write your *Consequence* questions before you get to your sales call? You have to go through the mental exercise of reverse thinking to get to your question. The *Consequence* questions are hard to create, but need to be created. These are the questions that motivate your customer to buy.

Some Consequence questions

Consequence questions ask about the consequences of problems. Often those problems relate to budgets, productivity, goal achievement, sales and employee issues. You probably have a good idea about the consequences that your prospects could experience if they are not using your products and services. If you don't you could ask your existing customers what would happen if they didn't use your products or services.

A few *Consequence* questions are:

- What effect does increased downtime have on profits?
- How will this affect other areas?
- What would happen if employee retention decreased?
- How does lower meeting attendance impact you?
- How does an increased sales cycle effect meeting your sales goals?
- How do missing budget goals impact your department?
- What results when your employees miss their goals?
- What happens to other areas when budgets are cut?
- How do customer satisfaction scores impact your budget?
- What does employee turnover cost your organization?
- How do delivery delays effect your department?
- How does poor performance impact your sales?
- How does (product) purchasing impact the work you do?

How to leverage Consequence questions

When you ask *Consequence* questions, you are asking your prospect to realize that he does have problems that are impacting his business. For many prospects, they have been denying that these issues are big enough to act on and do something. When they hear the consequences, it's difficult to ignore the problems. Some prospects still are unwilling to act. You have to magnify the effects of the consequences.

> Dollars magnify the effects of consequences.

One way to magnify the effects of consequences is to translate the consequence into dollars. Take the binder in the law office. You've already uncovered the problem of needing the binders quickly. Perhaps the law firm bills by the minute and minutes wasted looking for binders are minutes that can't be billed. But how much is that worth? That's your job to uncover and quantify in dollars.

Ask the prospect, "How many minutes a day do you think you take looking for binders?" If the prospect says, "Each day it's 20 minutes," you may think that's not much time. Now multiply it by 5 days a week and 52 weeks a year. You now have 5200 minutes a year. You then ask your prospect what his time is worth. If he doesn't know, ask him the rate that his time is being billed at. If you assume $50/hour, the 5200 minutes are now worth $4,333 a year. Do you think a buyer would be willing to pay $1 more per binder and be able to avoid wasting $4,333 a year? I'll bet he would.

> When consequences are in dollars they are impossible to ignore.

When you get dollars you now speak the universal language of business. Everyone understands what the problems cost. When consequences are in dollars, they are impossible to ignore. Prospects have to act.

Tell me more

Once you think you're heard it all, you still are not done. Your job is to magnify the effects of the consequences and see what other areas these problems and consequences impact. One way to do that is to ask your prospect to "Tell me more." That simple statement gets people talking more and you will uncover more areas that are significant to address with the prospect.

Another phrase to remember to use is "That sounds serious!" After you hear a consequence, no matter what it is, to magnify the pain, you can and should respond, "That sounds serious."   You must make sure your prospect understands that the issue at hand is a real problem, it's significant, and he has to act now.

Be sure to ask the *Consequence* questions before your present your products and services. Why? Unless you've created the awareness that the problem is painful, a prospect will often later say, "I need to think about it" or even worse think or say, "It's not worth the hassle." They will do nothing. Your hard work goes nowhere. When you create the understanding that the pain is great, the customer has to act and buy.

Asking Desire questions

Desire questions are not as hard as *Consequence* questions. Most salespeople still forget to ask them. Why? They don't realize the power of these questions. Desire questions show you what the prospect is thinking about and why he would want to buy something to solve his problem. When you know what your prospect is thinking, you can make a stronger link to your product as the solution.

What are Desire Questions

> Desire questions tell you about the pleasure, or why a prospect would want your product as the solution to his problems.

Desire questions are like the flip side of *Consequence* questions. Remember that *Consequence* questions are painful. They highlight the pain of the problems that a prospect is having. The flip side of pain is pleasure. The Desire questions tell you about the pleasure, or why a prospect would want your product as the solution to his problems. Instead of being negative, these are positive questions.

Don't think you know why

Some sales professionals don't bother asking *Desire* questions. Why? They think they know why their prospects want to buy a product to solve their problems. Often if the problem costs a lot of money, the sales professional thinks, "This is a great way to reduce costs. That's why he's buying." Often, they're wrong.

I had a customer once who was a serious, no-nonsense, bottom line manager. He got right down to business in our meetings. He paid attention to costs and his budget. He was not a back-slapping warm and fuzzy kind of a guy. I had a product that would cut his maintenance costs by thousands of dollars. Do you think a guy like I described would be looking to buy a product simply because it could save him money? You probably would since I described him as a bottom line kind of guy. Nevertheless, I asked him *Desire* questions. I asked this down to business guy, "If we could work together to reduce your transmission failures, what would it mean to you personally?" I was amazed at his answer.

He told me that his maintenance shop was not air conditioned. In the summer the maintenance facility and his garage bays could get to nearly 100 degrees. His poor maintenance guys had to work in that extreme environment. There was no way to air condition the garage. Trucks were going in and out all day. It would be like air conditioning the outside. He felt sorry for his maintenance crew. He told me, "If we can reduce transmission failures, my guys won't have to be under as many trucks and suffer in the heat so much. I would like to help out my guys." That was an answer I never expected.

Customers buy for their reasons not yours

You may think you can avoid asking these questions, but if you do that, you'll weaken your sales strategy. Remember that customers buy for their reasons, not yours. The only way to learn what their reasons are is to ask them. When they tell you their reasons, which is what you learn when you ask *Desire* questions, your prospect is clarifying his reward. You are then able to position your product to match what they want. With the information, you can personalize your presentation to that prospect's specific reason for wanting the solution. That's the reward you deliver when your prospect buys your product. Now you know how to motivate your prospect.

Use "You" in Desire questions

Just as in your *Pinball* questions, you want your prospect to listen and thoughtfully answer your *Desire* questions. When you include the word "you" in your Desire questions, you force the listener to pay attention. By paying attention to your question, you'll get a better answer.

Benefit and Helpful are good words to include

You want to use positive words as you ask your prospects about why they would want a solution. "Benefit" is a positive word. "Helpful" is another positive word. These words should be part of your *Desire* questions.

Make a stronger tie to your solution

> It is dangerous to assume you already know why your customer will want to buy.

You could assume you know the reason why your customer wants to buy. I already told you about my situation where I was astounded at the response from my customer. I predict that you will find more prospects who give you unexpected answers to your *Desire* questions.

What if you had proceeded to present your product with your assumptions? Your customer would feel less tied to the solution. You lost an opportunity to personalize the reason to act. In all cases, you want to execute the strongest sales strategy you can. By using your prospect's reasons to buy, and not yours, you will make your sales strategy stronger.

Learn more from your Desire Questions

The answers to your *Desire* questions are important information. They're your prospects reasons why he wants a solution. It's what's in it for him. There's more information that *Desire* questions can get you. There are different types of *Desire* Questions. The acronym to remember the types of *Desire* questions is ICE.   I is for identify (I), (C) for clarify and (E) for expand. Desire questions can i*dentify* the reward for a prospect. Other Desire questions c*larify* why the reward is important to the prospect. Lastly, you can e*xpand* on the value of the reward with additional *Desire* questions.

Here are some examples and type of *Desire* Questions:

- What advantages do you see from ______? (I)

This Desire question identifies what advantages the prospect sees.

- Would it help your business if you could_____? (I)

This Desire question identifies if there is an advantage to doing what you propose.

- How would ____ help you? (C)

The prospect clarifies for you the reasons that your solution would help your prospect.

- Why is that important to you? (C)

The prospect clarifies for you the reasons that your solution is important to him.

- Would that help in other areas? (E)

This question allows the prospect to expand the different areas that could benefit from your solution.

ABDC. Now What?

You've executed your questioning strategy and your prospect has given you answers. You've learned about your prospect's business. You have identified three needs from your *Bad* questions. Your customer highlighted the consequences of his problems. With additional questions you've quantified the consequences in dollars and it's a big amount. You finished by asking *Desire* questions to learn why your prospect wants a solution. Now what?

Remember to ask for your prospect's business.

Your job is to ask for the prospect's business. Your prospect will almost never say, "I think I need to buy." In my 25 plus years in sales, I've had that kind of "sales miracle" happen just once. You can expect the same sort of frequency. It's your job as a sales professional to ask for your prospect's business. The only way I do that is as follows.

> Based on what you've told me today, it sounds as if we have a reason to do business together. When should we begin?

Opening versus Closing

You may have wondered if I teach closing skills and what questions to ask to close. I don't teach closing skills. If you find yourself focusing on how you're going to "close" your customer, you may be making selling harder than it needs to be. I'm always looking to simplify the sales process and make it easier. Your ABCD questioning strategy is the only way I know to make selling easier for you. It forces you to focus on your customer, instead of yourself. It's also the only way I know that you can close.

You certainly want your prospects to buy. It's your job to find out why they should buy from you. The way to find out is to ask for this information. That's why questioning and listening skills are so important in selling.

You can never predict with complete accuracy how a sales call will unfold. You still have to prepare a plan for how you want the sales call to flow. You should have a questioning strategy. The questions that you prepare are a general map for gathering the information you need to sell. This starts by understanding how to create your ABCD questioning strategy.

By starting with questions, you begin a dialogue that allows you to develop a customized presentation. When you focus on customers and their needs, you gather the information that you need to sell. You can then determine how to best serve your customer and present your products and services.

A good questioning strategy is your closing strategy.

After you have identified 3 customer needs, you can demonstrate why you and your products are the best choice for your customer. Why risk being perceived as a pushy salesperson? Let your customer perceive you as being a helpful salesperson. And when you are preparing the questions to ask, remember the last one. It's "When would you like to buy?" That's the only close I know.

Getting the Desired Results from Asking Questions

Ideas for Skillful Questioning

How to ask questions

One at a time

Your job as a sales professional includes being skilled at asking questions. You are not filling out an application and asking question after question in rapid fire, one question after another. You should instead ask one question at a time.

> Avoid sounding like an interrogator.

Some salespeople get so excited that they ask one question and immediately follow with another question. How can a prospect give a thoughtful response to either question? By the time the second question came, the prospect is probably thinking about the answer to the first question. The prospect might not even hear the second question.

If too many questions come at once, it sounds like an interrogation. Your prospects will feel less like talking with you. Avoid making them feel uncomfortable. Ask a question and wait for the answer. Based on what you hear, you can comment on the answer. Then ask the next question.

Delicate Questions require skill

Imagine a person who you don't know very well asking you how much money you earn or how much you paid for your house. Those are personal questions that most people would feel very uncomfortable answering. If you were applying for a bank loan, the bank would need to ask you how much you make. Even so, that question is an emotional one and needs to be asked delicately.

Instead of asking delicate questions in your normal voice volume, you could soften your voice slightly and speak a little quieter. Certainly, don't get louder for delicate questions. It's too forceful and assertive.

Use "because"

When you use the word "because" it makes your question more persuasive. There has been research done on persuasion using the word "because." The experiment had people cutting in the line where people were waiting to make copies. The experimenters asked to cut in line. When they asked by including the word "because" and giving a reason to cut in line, the people granted them permission to cut in over 90% of the time. What's so interesting about the experiment was that even when the reason made no sense, the person in line let the experimenter cut in. "Because" is a very powerful word that you can use to explain why you are asking a delicate question.

> Because is a persuasive word and gets more compliance when you use it.

How old are you—because management wants to be able to send birthday cards to our most important customers?

Don't answer your questions either during or after.

Have you ever been asked a question and the questioner also answered the question? That's something you want to pay particular attention to as you're selling. You want to avoid the practice of answering your own questions. I've seen sales professionals ask prospects:

Are you planning on expanding your business?
You are, aren't you?

Do you see how they answer their own questions? That is not helpful when you sell. First, you limit the possibilities of the answers you might get. That's a bad idea. You're narrowing your prospect's thinking by suggesting an answer. Your job is to find out what he thinks, not put ideas in his head.

> Make sure, especially at the beginning of the sales call that you are engaging your prospect in a business conversation.

Secondly, it stops the flow of the conversation. In sales, a monologue is not good for selling. You want to engage your prospect in conversation especially at the beginning of the sales call. Conversation relaxes people. Relaxed prospects talk more. That's what you want in your sales calls.

If your prospect pauses to respond, some sales professionals jump in and answer for the prospect. Don't do that either. Your job is to wait patiently for the answer. Silence is beneficial in the sales call. It means someone is thinking. Thinking is a good thing in sales! Let your prospect think of the answer he wants to give you and wait until he chooses to respond.

Don't interrupt.

Interrupting people who are speaking is a major error that some salespeople make. Do your best to wait until you believe your prospect is done speaking. Often when a prospect is done speaking he will take a breath. That breath is your cue that you can follow with a statement or question.

> Listen for when your prospect stops talking before you say something.

Sometimes you will make a mistake and think your prospect is done speaking and you start to speak. If that's the case and your prospect is not done speaking, quickly apologize.

I'm sorry. I interrupted you. Please continue.

Then be silent. Your prospect will continue and you can listen.

Follow with related questions.

Along with planning your questions, you should plan the order that you'll ask them. You can start with smaller issues or problems and move on to bigger customer issues. You could start with infrastructure questions and move on to employee questions. Don't bounce around from one subject area to another. You'll confuse your prospects. By keeping to related questions, you make it easier for prospects to answer your questions.

Wait for the answer

Great sales professionals are patient people. You can see this when they ask a question and actually wait for a prospect to answer. By waiting, you show your prospects respect. You also give them time

Learn to get comfortable with silence during the sales call.

to think. They will give you better answers when they've had time to think through their answers before speaking.

By waiting for a response, you have to be comfortable with silence. Some salespeople are not. The way to get comfortable with silence is to practice incorporating it into your selling. Ask a question and wait in silence. You can count to see how long you can be silent. It's important to wait for your prospect to answer. If you talk first, you lose something valuable in the sales call.

You've just interrupted his train of thought. That means you might not get as thoughtful an answer as you would have. By waiting, you also show your prospect that you are patient. When salespeople are patient, they are seen as being less pushy. That's a good perception to create in sales.

These are just some of the areas to consider when you deliver your questions. There are other ways you can improve your questions and your questioning strategy.

Improve your communication

More than just words

You may think that the words you use are the most important part in getting your customer to understand you. In fact, the impact of communication comes less from the words you say than how you say them.

How you look and sound is more important for communication than the words you use.

A researcher at UCLA, Dr. Albert Mehrabian, concluded that the impact of the understanding of communication came from three components: the visual, the verbal and the vocal. He found that the percentages in contributing to the understanding of the intended message are:

- 7% from verbal component
- 55% from visual component
- 38% from vocal component

You can see that how (visual and vocal) you say what you say is more important than what (verbal) you say.

Look like an effective communicator

Appearance

You may think it's unfair, but your prospects are judging you by how you look. You can see from the above statistic that 55% of the believability of your message comes from the visual component, or how you look.

Sales professionals who dress appropriately for their prospects and customers are more credible. If you are calling on law offices, conservative, more formal apparel is appropriate. If you are calling on factories or mines, more informal attire is appropriate. Successful salespeople look successful. Determine what that means for your selling.

While sitting, maintain good posture. You want to avoid slumping. Poor posture looks less confident and detracts from your credibility. A slight tilt of your head communicates nonverbally, or without words, that you are an active listener and are paying attention.

Make eye contact

Confident people are able to make consistent eye contact with the people they're speaking to. If you are uncomfortable making eye contact, be sure to have a pen and paper with you. That way you'll have a reason to take notes and avoid eye contact.

Sound confident

Sounding confident is an important contributor to your communication success. When you ask questions, you must sound confident. How does confidence sound?

Be fluent

> Join Toastmasters if you have a problem with fluency. They'll teach you how to avoid saying "Uhm" and "Uh."

Confident people speak fluently. Fluency means you speak without using interrupters or verbal pauses like "uhms" and "ahs." People who use interrupters as they speak sound less confident. It's also hard to listen to people whose speech includes endless "uhms, ahs and "like, you know?" phrases.

Control your volume and tone

A confident speaker talks in a volume that is neither too loud nor too soft. Your tone of voice should be interesting so avoid a monotone. Monotone voices are hard to listen to anyway.

Emphasize words equally

Make sure you speak with equal emphasis on the beginning of your sentences as you have at the end. For example, you could say, "I would like to recommend you use this." You should have equal emphasis on the words at the beginning of the sentence as you do on the words at the end of the sentence. If you don't, and speak like you've "run out of gas" at the end of the sentence, you sound less committed to the idea and less confident.

Avoid Valley Girl speak

If you understand how sentences and questions sound, you'll understand what the Valley Girl does as she talks. In the English language, the sound at the end of a statement goes down. The beginning of the sentence sounds higher than the end. A question is the opposite. Questions start lower and end higher. That's how you know it's a question. The words "John is good" can be pronounced as a statement or question depending if the word "good" goes down or up. If "good" rises at the end, it's a question. If it doesn't, it's a statement.

The Valley Girl mixes this up. Her statements rise at the end like questions. That's what makes them sound so unintelligent. They also sound less confident. Avoid sounding like a Valley Girl. Especially when people are nervous, they might fall into this Valley Girl pattern. That's why it is so important to prepare for your sales calls. You can avoid the nervousness that leads to this less confident sounding habit.

Conclusions

You've read many ideas in this manual about creating your own questioning strategy to guide your prospects and customers to buy your products and services. Hopefully, you understand how important it is to work on your questioning strategy before your sales calls so you can be prepared, less stressed, and better able to control the flow of the sales call.

The French philosopher, Voltaire, once said, "Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers." He wasn't in sales, but his observation certainly relates to selling. He is right about suggesting that you can judge someone by the quality of his questions. Just remember, your prospects and customers are judging you by your questions, too.

> "Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers."
>
> Voltaire

Now you can ask the best questions that help you close more business now.

Best wishes for your selling success!

Index

R

S

T

V

$100 Value

Free Questioning Strategy Consulting-$100 Value

Use Maura Schreier-Fleming's consulting service on any questioning or sales issue for 30 minutes by phone or email

Non-transferable

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About Maura Schreier-Fleming

Maura Schreier-Fleming wrote her first book Real-World Selling for Out-of-this-World Results when she recognized that salespeople want real-world skills and strategies to apply to their selling. In her conversational, targeted style, she helps salespeople close more business and shorten their sales cycles.

She began her career in sales at Mobil Oil. An engineer by training, she was Mobil's first female lubrication engineer in the U.S. She later moved to Texas, and worked for Chevron. She sold more than $9 million worth of product. Maura has been in sales for more than 20 years.

Maura started her company, Best@Selling (www.BestatSelling.com) in 1997. She wrote her own job description and created a dream job. She writes about selling and speaks at conferences across the world about sales and business. Selling is the best job in the world when it's done right. She also works with sales professionals and managers who want to optimize their selling time using skills and strategies that immediately work in real-world selling situations. Clients include Chevron, the Houston Texans, UPS, J.C. Penney and other businesses interested in improving selling skills and strategies.

She teaches their salespeople how to quickly persuade customers, improve their listening and strategically question to sell. She also teaches selling skills and strategies at Southern Methodist University's Continuing Education Program and the Small Business Development Center.

She writes several selling columns. Her "Customer Connections" columns appear in the Dallas, Austin and Houston Business Journals. She also writes the column "Selling Strategies" for the Insurance Record magazine. Maura writes the Women in Business blog for Allbusiness.com.

Maura's articles on business and selling have been published nationally in a variety of publications. She was a featured expert on sales at Microsoft's bCentral website and has appeared on radio shows across the country to discuss sales and business.

Maura has a B.S. degree from Cornell University and an M.S. degree from Georgia Tech.