



Track: Customer Relationship Development

Unit 6: Asking the Right Questions

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the difference between an open-ended question and a closed-ended question
- List at least four ways that questions add value to the sales process
- Recognize five different types of questions to ask in the sales process
- Develop a questions map



Reflect on the following question.

What are some of the most common failure paths in selling? Where do we go wrong? Capture your ideas below.

Asking the Right Questions

The Questions You Ask:

Think about the questions that you typically ask in your sales interactions, or the ones that you think you should ask, and capture the actual questions in the left hand column of the table below. Work to capture between 5 and 10 questions.

Question	O/C	Category

What Do I Know About Questions?

Review the statements below and determine whether they are true or false.

	True/False	Statement
1.		Questions help us to qualify a prospect.
2.		You shouldn't ask a question that you already know the answer to.
3.		When 75% of your questions are open-ended and engaging, there is a significantly higher probability of success in your business development interaction.
4.		Most of the time the reason that you face a stall or an objection is because you failed to ask a question.
5.		Buying is an emotionally driven decision, and questions can help you to create emotions.
6.		Good, thoughtful questions help us to build credibility and trust.
7.		We should try to surface any potential objections or concerns that the prospect might have through our questions process.
8.		Successful sales people help their prospects self-discover the solution by asking thoughtful, well sequenced questions.
9.		If a prospect or customer asks us a question about price before we are ready to position our solution, we should answer the question.
10.		A thorough questions process will gather information about the customer, your competition, the budget, the decision making process, and the customer's time frame.
11.		Sales people routinely ask questions about the decision making process and the budget.
12.		In the questions step of the process, you should spend 50% of your time talking, and 50% of your time listening.

The Criteria of A Great Question

- Engages the prospect in a _____
- Helps the prospect to _____ the solution to their _____
- Identifies the prospect's _____
- _____ with _____ like:
 - _____?
 - _____?
 - _____?
- Begins with _____ like:
 - _____ me about...
 - _____ for me...
 - _____ about...



Look back at the questions that you captured on page 3, and identify in the second column if the question is open-ended and truly engaging, or if it is closed-ended, and then tally your totals below.

Number of open-ended/engaging questions:

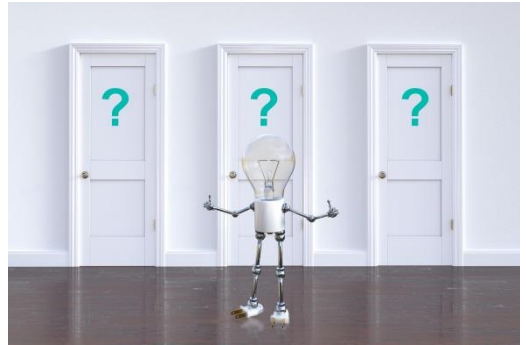
Number of closed-ended questions:

FACT: When 75% of your questions are truly open-ended and engaging, you significantly increase the probability of your success in selling your solution!

Ask Questions to Learn About:

- **The Customer**

- The person(s)
- *The business*
- *Industry trends/insights*
- What's changing?
- Goals and objectives
- Problems and challenges
- Needs (Products and services of the utility)



To position your products and services, you must get the customer engaged in dialogue about those services. Write some great open-ended questions to generate dialogue on the following products and services.

Residential:

Natural Gas Appliances

Natural Gas Heating

Natural Gas Outdoor Amenities

Tankless water heaters

Commercial:

CHP

Gas air conditioning

Gas heat pump

Ask Questions to Learn About:

- **The Competition**
 - Other forms of energy
 - Likes and dislikes
 - Experience with your LDC
- **The Budget**
 - What have they spent in the past
 - What is the current budget
 - Expected return on investment
 - Cost of doing nothing
- **The Decision Making Process**
 - Who is involved with making the decision
 - Who has ultimate authority for the decision
 - The process
- **The Time Frame**
 - The timeline for a decision
 - The timeline for implementation



Sorting Out Your Questions

Sort the questions on page 3 into categories (Customer, Competition, Budget, Decision Making Process, and Time Frame), and identify the voids – the areas of the questions structure that you didn't have any questions written. Capture questions below that would fill the void categories.

Asking Follow-Up Questions to Go Deeper

After we've asked our planned questions, we should look for opportunities to ask follow up questions that take the conversation deeper. We should demonstrate REAL curiosity!

Ask Follow-Up Questions to Understand Things Like:

- The impact of meeting or not meeting goals
- The consequence of solving or not solving a problem
- Priorities among goals and challenges
- The issue more deeply

Review the question and answer scenarios below, and identify some follow-up questions that you could ask.

Question: Tell me about your electricity bill.

Answer: It runs about \$250 per month, year-round

Follow Up:

Question: Tell me about the age of your HVAC equipment.

Answer: The furnace that we have is about 25 years old. Our Air Conditioner is about 15 years old.

Follow Up:

Question: Tell me about your goals as it relates to being more energy efficient.

Answer: We would like to reduce our energy consumption by 25% over the course of the next two years.

Follow Up:

Case Studies

Pick a case study from below, and work to begin mapping out your questions for your sales interaction on the following pages.

RESIDENTIAL SCENARIO

You have just learned of a new 300 home subdivision that is being built in your area, and you make a phone call to set an appointment with the residential developer to talk about utilizing natural gas.

You are interested in positioning heating and water heating via natural gas, at a minimum, and further positioning the use of natural gas stoves, dryers and outdoor amenities. Based on averages, you project that the margin of profit on an annual basis to the LDC is approximately \$150,000.



COMMERCIAL SCENARIO

You make a call on a 200 bed hospital in your community and learn that they are using electricity as their primary source of energy, and that they are trying to reduce energy costs.

You believe that the hospital could generate its own power with a CHP system, and want to sell the concept. This could be an investment of \$300K in an engine driven generator, and could have a three to four year payback. To get a commitment to this would involve doing some energy analysis and projecting the cost savings.



Case Study Questions Map

CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about the person
- *Questions about the business*
- *Questions about industry trends/insights*
- Questions about goals and objectives
- Questions about what's changing
- Questions about problems and challenges
- Questions about needs (the products and services you want to position)

Case Study Questions Map

COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about other forms of energy
- Questions about likes and dislikes
- Questions about experience with your LDC

BUDGET

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about what they have spent in the past
- Questions about their current budget
- Questions about the expected return on investment
- Questions about the cost of doing nothing

Case Study Questions Map

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about who is involved with making the decision
- Questions about who has ultimate authority for the decision
- Questions about the decision making process

TIME FRAME

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about the timeline for a decision
- Questions about the timeline for implementation

HOMework

- Using the Observation Form on the next page, find someone in your LDC that you could practice your questioning skills with, and walk through the questions that you mapped on pages 10-12. Please use the questions map document during the practice, and then ask your partner to evaluate the practice and give you feedback.
- Create an additional questions map for a real prospect or existing customer using the template on pages 15-17 of the handout. To begin this process, think about the challenges that the customer is likely facing, what products and services you might want to position, and what your commitment objective for the call is. Once you've completed those steps, create your questions map.



QUESTIONS SKILL PRACTICE



Find a partner that you can practice your questioning skills with, and take a few minutes and practice asking the questions that you mapped out on the previous pages. Your partner will evaluate your practice by using the criteria in the checklist below.

Watch to See if the Person Practicing:	Notes:
Asked questions to get to know the customer and their business (commercial)	
Asked questions to learn about the competition	
Asked questions to understand the budget	
Asked questions to learn about decision making	
Asked questions to identify the customer's time frame	
Open Ended Questions: (Tally)	
Closed Ended Questions: (Tally)	
The best question was:	
One thing the seller did really well was:	

Homework Questions Map

CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about the person
- *Questions about the business*
- *Questions about industry trends/insights*
- Questions about goals and objectives
- Questions about what's changing
- Questions about problems and challenges
- Questions about needs (the products and services you want to position)

Homework Questions Map

COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about other forms of energy
- Questions about likes and dislikes
- Questions about experience with your LDC

BUDGET

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about what they have spent in the past
- Questions about their current budget
- Questions about the expected return on investment
- Questions about the cost of doing nothing

Homework Questions Map

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about who is involved with making the decision
- Questions about who has ultimate authority for the decision
- Questions about the decision making process

TIME FRAME

Think about the following topic areas for questions:

- Questions about the timeline for a decision
- Questions about the timeline for implementation

Questions Map Job Aid – Sample Questions

Customer Intelligence

The Person

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. What is your role here? How long have you been with the business? What did you do before this? What is your background as it relates to manufacturing?

The Business

- Tell me about your business. How many locations do you have? How many employees do you have? What products do you manufacture? Who are your customers? Who are your competitors?

Industry Trends/Insights

- What's going on in your industry right now that is making life challenging? What are some recent trends in the industry that you are managing? I read about trend X; how are you managing it?

Change

- What has changed in your business in the recent past? What is about to change? How will the changes challenge the business? What opportunities might emerge from the change?

Goals and Objectives

- What are the three most important goals that you need to achieve in the next 12 months? What are the barriers that will impede you from reaching those goals/objectives?

Problems and Challenges

- What are the major challenges that you are currently trying to resolve in your area? Why? What are the consequences of resolving or not resolving those issues?

Needs –Residential

- Tell me about the appliances you have in your home, and your experiences using natural gas.
- How would you feel about paying slightly more for an appliance, if it saves you money on your utility bills?
- What challenges are you experiencing with your fuel deliveries?
- How do you heat your home?
- What comfort challenges do you experience in the winter time?
- What concerns do you have about having an oil tank in your basement?
- Tell me about your outdoor living space and how you use it.
- What months of the year are you able to enjoy your outdoor space?
- If you had the ability to extend the season (spring to fall) would you enjoy that?
- Tell me about your habits around using an outdoor grill.
- What is the fuel source on your grill? What, if any, challenges have you had with using propane?
- Tell me about your family's demands for hot water.
- What, if any, challenges are you facing with your hot water supply?
- What is your expectation in terms of the life of the system, and if you had to spend a little more up front to get a system that would last longer, would that be appealing to you?

Questions Map Job Aid – Sample Questions

Customer Intelligence - Continued Needs – Commercial

- Tell me about the cost of electricity in your area.
- What issues do you face as it relates to the reliability of your electric power?
- When you have electrical outages, how do you manage them?
- Tell me about your hot water demands and how you currently satisfy them. What challenges are you facing?
- Tell me about your heating needs.
- How big and how old are your electric air conditioners?
- How are you cooling your facility (rooftops or chillers)?
- Tell me about your knowledge/expertise with CHP systems.
- What advantages would you experience with the ability to generate your own electricity from natural gas?
- If you were going to invest in this technology, in what time frame would you expect the technology to pay for itself?
- How would you project your energy costs with this type of system?

Competitive Intelligence

- What forms of energy are you currently using for your heating and cooling systems
- What do you like/dislike about those forms of energy?
- Why are you considering a change?
- Tell me about your experiences using natural gas.

Budget

- Tell me about what you've spent in the past for energy.
- What is your current annual energy budget, and how is that determined?
- What return are you looking for on this project investment?
- What is the value to you and the organization of lowering your overall energy costs?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?

Decision Making Process

- Who owns your home?
- What appliances are you responsible for in the home?
- Who, besides yourself, will be involved in this decision? What role will you play in the decision making process? What role will others play?
- Who has the ultimate authority to fund or veto the project?

Time Frame

- Describe the process that is typically used to make decisions like this in your business.
- When do you think you will make a decision?
- When is the best time to implement a solution like this?
- To have the project finished by this time, what will you need to do to prepare, and about how much time will each of these things take? So, by when do you need to make the decision so that the implementation can be on your timeline?