

Good Questions Unlock the Door

What is the key difference between the run-of-the-mill sales server and a sales superstar? Jo(e) Average Salesperson talks-talks-talks about features-features-features causing customers to feel bored-bored-bored. The sales professional knows that customers decide to buy because they become intellectually and emotionally stimulated... And this can only be done by active customer involvement

This article is designed to offer you an alternative approach to heightening a customer's interest in you, your organization and your products. How? Increasing his awareness of his own situation.

Most customers have only vague ideas and half-formed hopes of what they want. A true sales professional provides the Windex to those cloudy visions. People buy when there's a discrepancy between where they are now and where they would like to be. The bigger the gap, the bigger the likelihood that they will buy from somebody. Sometimes it's because they want more-better-faster. Other times, it's because they're in real trouble and need a solution to get them out of the bind. Either way, they're motivated to buy because something is currently lacking for them. Salespeople can provide real value if they can increase the customer's awareness and excitement around his present and future states. The tool in this quest - asking great questions.

Picture a questioning continuum. On the far-left side are "closed" questions. Closed questions yield a "yes/no" answer and usually start with "have you, do you, are you, can you, will you". Examples include: Do you currently have a CD player? Have you looked at the XYZ model? Are you looking for something with more features? You learn little and the monosyllabic responses are not the source of customer passion. In other words, you sound just like every other salesperson in every other store. So, closed questions aren't a valuable tool in the windexing process.

What other kinds of questions can we

ask? Again, picture the questioning continuum. Move toward the middle, and we'll examine "open" questions. Open questions are designed to gain more information from customers. They usually start with "what, why; how, tell me, help me understand". Examples include: What are you looking for? What brand name do you prefer? How big a system do you want? With open questions, you do learn something, but a customer could answer those questions from an "auto pilot" response mode. All car drivers have experienced the feeling of arriving at their destination without remembering how they got there. We're capable of the same lack of consciousness in conversation. Open questions reveal the basics, but they don't allow us to stimulate the customer's internal buying quotient.

To do this, let's look at the far right side of our questioning continuum. The trick is to ask customers questions that cause customers to "THINK". I call these "High Value" questions. An advanced form of open questions, they're questions that cause a person to reflect, analyze, evaluate, assess, compare, speculate, and express mood and feelings. They get beyond data and facts into the domain of knowledge, experience, interpretation, and impressions. They engage a customer at intellectual and emotional levels by focusing on his "now" and "future" states.

CONSIDER:

- What kind of entertainment systems do you currently have?
- How have your entertainment ideas changed over the past few years?
- As you see your (family) life evolving over the next few years, what areas of entertainment are becoming more important?
- What areas are becoming less important?
- Recognizing that most people can't have everything at once, where are your entertainment priorities?
- If you were able to get a new system, how

would that affect the way you entertain with family and friends?

- If you put off the purchase of a new system, what would be the consequences?
- Take me through some typical relaxation time in your home. What are all of the people doing, listening to or watching?
- It sounds like you've waited for a number of years to upgrade your system. What's driving you to enhance it at this time?
- As a responsible buyer, you're undoubtedly looking at a number of factors in selecting a retail source. What are the criteria that will guide your decision?
- How will this entertainment system fit into your family's lifestyle?
- If there were three features that you could not do without, what might they be?
- What are the aspects of your last entertainment system that irked you the most?
- If you could wave a magic wand and have the perfect system for your lifestyle, what might it look like?
- Picture yourself living with this,...what are some of the things that you would want it to do? Why?
- Who else will be using this? What's important to them?
- How is this going to be used in your house? Take me through a typical month with this as the focal point?

Notice that these questions shift the role of the salesperson from peddler of product to consultant and helper. They can differentiate you from the vendor down the road and increase the likelihood that your customer will remember you as a caring service provider. They will get you invited into the customer's visionary world and equip you to build a "customerized" solution.

Try asking high value questions over the next few weeks. They can open the door to rich and rewarding conversations and long-term customer relationships.