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Guerrilla Sales & Marketing

The Power of Questions

LORI TURNER

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Lori Turner

Let's face it. The word "sales" for many people can have a negative connotation. It's often associated with old-style, won't-take-no-for-an-answer tactics that involve selling a product or service whether or not it is actually a fit for the customer.

A more effective, though not exactly new, style of selling is called consultative selling. Some call it needs-based selling, strategic selling or spin selling. This method's success hinges on one simple yet often overlooked fact: There is no basis for a sale until you solve a problem.

With this approach, the sales rep functions as consultant, uncovering the customer's needs and pains, then adapting the product or service sales pitch to match. It's about tailoring messages to a prospect's actual needs – not the needs you assume he has, but the ones he's actually vocalized.

A more sophisticated selling approach, consultative selling, will accelerate sales. The challenge is to keep quiet and not sell until you really know what the prospect needs and how they want to be sold.

Perhaps the most important component in consultative selling is the needs assessment. This is where you ask a series of well-thought-out, open-ended questions designed to uncover your prospect's deeper needs and buying motives.

Sounds easy? It's not. It's an art form that takes time to master. To succeed, you want to ask precisely the right questions, in the right sequence. Listen intently so you can modify your questioning strategy to suit the situation.

The questions should almost always be open-ended, intended to keep the prospect talking 80 percent of the time – the telltale sign of a good sales call.

Here's a tip for asking an open-ended question: start with "Talk to me about ..." or "Tell me ..."

Let's say you're selling financial planning services. Your high-impact questions might include:

- Define for me what a successful financial planner relationship looks like. (The prospect may give you the benefits of your product or service.)
- Tell me about how often your financial planner meets with you and the value of those meetings. (This might uncover a desire to see more of the planner or for more substance during meetings – yet more ammunition for your pitch.)
- Tell me what's worked well with financial planners you've used in the past. And what could have been better. (This is a nice, low-key way of getting at the prospect's pain points with your competitors.)
- Tell me about your hesitancy in the past to change financial planners.
- Tell me what it would take for you to give our company a shot at your business. (This is a great wrap-up question. Answered candidly, your prospect has handed you a formula for securing their business.)

Whether you are a sales person or the CEO, mastering the power of questioning will service you well for a lifetime. Not only will you close more business, but you will make your customers feel listened to and respected.

Lori Turner is managing partner, RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com



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