

Solution Selling® Tip: The Questions you ask

The CEO of a major client told me recently that he is convinced that the biggest sale he ever made was based on the *“questions he asked versus the questions he answered.”* That comment reminded me that the “eagle” salespeople (those 20% that develop 80% of the business) have *conversations with prospects* and *ask more questions* than the 80% of salespeople that develop only 20% of the business. This latter group depends more on making pitches & presentations to prospects and when doing so, they use “statements” versus questions.

There are so many places during the sales cycle to ask good questions, depending on where the prospect is in their buy cycle. Keep in mind also, that if the prospect is not interested in having you ask questions, consider that you may be column fodder and they just want a price quote/proposal so that they can use you as leverage against Column A (here, as you know, your reengineering skills should be applied).

In this TIP, we will review some types of questions to help you first **identify** and then **size the pain**:

- **Questions to get pain admitted**– A prospect will admit pain to you if you are perceived as credible and you demonstrate situational knowledge through the questions you ask. Recall the types of questions that you ought to be prepared with to uncover a prospect's pain. In other words, questions to help prospects recognize problems they did not think they were having or they did not think were solvable. They include:
 - **Information Questions**: An example: “How many salespeople do you have?” These questions can help you get facts & background information about a prospect. Do not ask too many Information Questions, particularly if basic in nature, as the prospect will think you did not do any homework. Try to get answers to many of your Information Questions prior to your calls.
 - **Situation Questions**: An example: “When a prospect calls a salesperson to ask a FAQ (Frequently Asked Question), how is that call handled?” These are great questions to ask as they can demonstrate your knowledge of their situation, they can uncover problems with the way prospects do something today, and hopefully set up capabilities you have to address their pains.
 - **Pain Questions**: An example: “Are you having difficulty implementing new technologies?” These can either be asked one at a time or via a menu approach. Either way, the power of Pain Questions is that you are probing directly for pain, problems or missed opportunities. A good Pain Question that does not put an executive on the defensive might be, “Of those people working for you, what are some of their challenges?” The follow-up question to that is, “What is the impact of those challenges on you?”
 - **Anxiety Questions**: These questions often start off with either “How would you feel if...?” or “Have you ever had the situation where...?” These are my favorite type of question as they are a very effective way of uncovering a prospect's pain. Use them to set up a “plausible emergency” that the prospect either might be having or one that they could relate to.
- **Questions to “size” the pain**– Once you identify the prospect's pain or missed opportunity, it is important to ask questions around sizing or scoping the pain. Meaning, let's start quantifying the pain to determine if the pain is significant enough for the prospect to do something about it! Also, for you to qualify if you want to pursue it further or probe for other pain. To size the pain, questions could include:
 - **How big a problem?** Is it a \$10 million problem or a \$10,000 problem?
 - **Is this your most pressing problem?** Is this #10 on your list of pains or #1 or #2?
 - **How does this impact you?** We will ask later how others are impacted, but let's find out now how this might be impacting this person's compensation, etc.
 - **How do you get the news that you have this problem?** Subtly, you are trying to determine who else might be involved in the decision making process.
 - **What is your time frame for fixing this problem?** What is the sense of urgency to address?

The questions that I have briefly reviewed above, do not even include the questions to ask when you are in either the 9 Block Vision Creation or Vision Reengineering model.

Remember, it is the questions that you ask that will help you differentiate yourself !