

Introduction

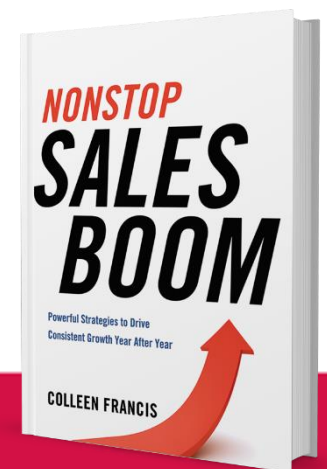
"To ask the right question is already half the solution to the problem" - Carl Jung

Successfully building a series of agreements with your prospects throughout the sales cycle depends 100% on your ability to ask the right questions. So what are the right questions to ask your prospect? Questions that move the prospect from an intellectual position of knowing that they have a problem that needs to be solved, to an emotional state of trusting you to solve that problem in a way that will satisfy them. The right questions are those questions that reveal true buying motivations.

The questions in this document are designed to help you in any sales conversation specifically to:

- Start and keep a dialogue going
- Listen to learn, not just listening to wait your turn to talk
- Find the buyer, build a relationship, and close the business
- Sell more, work less and make more money

Take this document on calls, and keep it by the phone. Use it as a guide to help develop your own questions and add to it as required, but use it. This was designed as a working document that can help you in any sales situation with any client.



The Fine Line.

In sales, there's a fine line between simply being inquisitive, and conducting an interrogation. The consequences of stepping over this line could cost you the sale, lose you the business or - worse yet - lose you a loyal customer for life.

The key to staying on the right side of this line lies in the questions you ask, and especially how you ask them. The following 5 tips will help you make sure you're perceived as being helpfully inquisitive rather than an uncompromising interrogator, and help you improve your delivery when it comes to asking those all-important sales questions:

1. Pause and listen.

Let's be honest - do you really listen to what your customers have to say, or are you just catching your breath between questions? If that sounds a little too familiar, try counting silently to three (at a regular speaking pace!) every time your prospect finishes talking. This will give them enough time to gather their thoughts and continue what they were saying if they haven't finished, while also not being a long enough pause to seem awkward if they are done talking, and are simply waiting for your response.

2. Support what they tell you only when you mean it.

Before you ask your next question, make sure to thank your prospect for the information they already provided in response to your previous one. It's not always easy for a prospect to open up, especially in the early stages of your relationship. If they have been generous with their information, thank them for being open. If they ask a great question, thank them for it. But while this approach can yield great results, don't ever fake a compliment or expression of gratitude. If you don't truly believe what you are telling and thanking your prospects for, then believe me - you won't be fooling anyone but yourself.

3. Take notes and ask for clarification.

To make sure you remember the details as well as the substance of what a customer is telling you, take notes, and ask for clarification any time they say something you don't fully understand. Remember, in sales, your best friends are "why," "how" and "what." Use them often to get additional information from your customers - and then don't forget to document their answers!

4. Echo and paraphrase.

They say that you never really understand something until you have to teach it to someone else. To be certain you really understand what a customer is telling you, repeat it back to them, using your own words and interpretation. Then end with a question, to gain their confirmation that your understanding is correct.

5. Watch your tone!

I never cease to be amazed at how many professional sales people ask questions of even their biggest clients or most promising prospects in a tone that sounds aggressive, accusatory or downright belligerent. If you've ever gotten the sense that you're coming on a little too strong, practice asking a colleague questions to determine whether you sound inquisitive or interrogational. If this isn't an option, take your manager with you on a call, and ask them for their constructive, honest feedback. 93% of the way prospects react to your questions will be based not on what you ask, but on the way you ask them. Finding out how you really sound could make the difference between being an average performer, and skyrocketing to the top of your profession.

Questions to Avoid.

Some questions are poison to the sales relationship simply because they are over used, cliché or too *salesy*. You might add others but these are the top 11 you should avoid in most cases. Find a different way to ask each of these questions that will get you the answer you are looking for and you will get a better answer plus build a better relationship.

1. "Who are you using right now?"
2. "How are they treating you?"
3. "Do you have a contract?"
4. "When does your contract expire?"
5. "Can we place a bid? I think we can save you some money."
6. "What kind of budget do you have?"
7. "Are you the decision maker?"
8. "Have you ever heard of us?"
9. "Tell me a little bit about your company."
10. "What would it take to get your business?"
11. "How are you?"

Qualifying Questions.

This is the process of determining whether the lead is the right fit for your products and services. Do they have a problem you can solve? Are they actively looking for a solution? Do they have money to spend? All these questions must be answered to determine if you have a qualified lead, worth your time to sell too.

12. What inspired you to call?
13. Why are you looking for...?
14. How did you hear about us?
15. How are you solving this problem today?
16. Why do you think we might be a good match?
17. How much money is set aside for this project?
18. When is the latest you want to have this (accomplished/installed/onsite)?
19. When are you looking to start?
20. What's most important to you about...?
21. Where do you see...?
22. What has been your experience with...?
23. How would you improve...?
24. Is anyone you're doing business with -----?
25. Are you looking for new -----?
26. Are you looking to make more -----?

Identifying the Decision Making Process.

Before you make a presentation or submit a proposal you need to make sure you understand how the buying process will work and who ultimately the buyer is. The buyer is the person who can authorize expenditures for your offer. They can make money appear when it's not in the budget and they can go to purchasing and tell them to sign a PO for you.

27. Who else is affected by this project?
28. How do you suggest we get them involved?
29. The last time you made a decision like this, how did you go about it?
30. Whose budget is supporting this initiative?
31. Whose budget does this project fall under?
32. Who is asking for this to be completed?
33. Who else besides you has a stake in this project?
34. Why has this project been earmarked for now?

Handling Objections.

It's important to understand the real meaning of objections. Prospect hesitation should come as no surprise if you think about it this way: Anyone, you included, who is about to make a large investment thinks twice about that decision before they commit. When a prospect is seriously considering your product, it is natural for them to be nervous and re-evaluate the criteria to make sure that they are not making the wrong decision. They are examining their own internal justifications and knocking the idea around vigorously to be sure it is not defective. Prospects do this because they are seriously thinking about engaging! A large investment is at stake, and saying yes is risky.

If price always seems to become an issue for you, one of the most effective strategies is to preempt the question by dealing with it up front. Don't be afraid to talk about price. Train yourself to bring it up first and get it on the table as early as possible in the sales dialogue. Try telling your prospective client something like:

35. "You need to know that ours is not the cheapest product available. You will always find someone who is less expensive than us, and you will always find someone who is more expensive than us. We are always competitive. Knowing that we are not the cheapest, does it make sense for us to go ahead?"

After a general objection is stated, you can ask the following questions:

36. How much too high are we?
37. Is price your only consideration?
38. Why do you feel that way?
39. If we resolve this, can we move forward?
40. What can we do to overcome that?
41. Have you done it that way before?
42. Is that the only thing stopping us from moving forward?
43. Have you seen that somewhere else before?

Some specific answers to "Your price is too high!"

44. Thanks for sharing that. How much too high are we?
45. I appreciate you telling me that. Have you found a less expensive product?

46. You are right; we are more expensive than some of our competitors. How much were you hoping to pay?
47. You're right, we are not the cheapest. Is price the only consideration?
48. Thanks for being honest. Is the price higher than you expected, or is it because we combined the services and training in one proposal?
49. I'm not surprised to hear you say that. Are we only too high overall or is our per-unit cost too high as well?
50. Thanks for sharing that. Is our price a showstopper?
51. I appreciate your honesty. Does our current price mean we will never be able to do business together?
52. Too high? Really?
53. What do you suggest we do?
54. Thanks for letting me know. I'm curious, how much were you expecting to invest?

Some specific answers to "We don't have any budget."

55. Budget?
56. Oh! I appreciate that makes it difficult to buy. When does your budget come up for renewal or review?
57. Thanks for letting me know. Is your budget renewed annually or quarterly?
58. Does not having a budget mean we will never get a chance to do business together this year?

Some specific answers to "OBJECTION: I need a discount!"

59. Discount?
60. It's good of you to be looking for the best deal. How much of a discount do you need? Why that much?
61. Making sure you're getting the best deal for your company is a good idea. If we can't budge on the price, does that mean it's over between us?

Establishing Decision Criteria.

Not only is it critical that you know how they will make a decision, you also need to know in what order of priority those criteria fall. Doing so will ensure you put the right offer together and make the right presentation that closes quickly and with fewest objections.

62. What's your ideal outcome?
63. How will you make your decision?
64. Which of those criteria are most important
65. The last time you decided to....how did you go about it?
66. What would be the return on investment?
67. How long will it take to accomplish that?
68. How much would you gain on the competition as a result?
69. If you ----- how would you use your ----- to build your business?
70. If you were able to achieve those goals, would ----- be worth it?

Qualifying the Criteria.

Don't allow the prospect to be subjective. You must quantify and qualify each buying criteria until you understand how it will be measured. Only then will you understand the facts and not be left with assumptions.

71. How will you do that?
72. What plans have you made to handle that?
73. How will you use that to your advantage?
74. How will your toughest competitor react to that?
75. Isn't that what you really want?
76. How are you taking advantage of the ----- opportunity?
77. How much is one new customer worth?
78. How much is one new business friend or relationship worth?
79. How often do you ----- ?
80. What rate of return (on sales, investment, etc.) are you looking for?
81. Why that amount?

Show Me the Money!

Just ask. It's not rude, aggressive or private to talk about money. In order to fully qualify the prospect you need to know how much money they are willing to spend, and whether that money has been allocated for the year.

82. How much money is set aside?
83. Are the funds allocated, or must they be requested?
84. What investment level are you expecting?
85. How much do you want to spend?
86. Do you have a budget set aside? How much?
87. Have you done this before? What was your previous budget?
88. What are you able to authorize during this year?
89. Normally projects of this size are between X and Y. How does that sound to you?

Growing the Opportunity.

Always look for opportunities to expand the scope and increase the order.

90. How about I provide you 2-3 options in my proposal?
91. Can I make a suggestion? I would like to propose 2-3 options for your consideration. Are you OK with that?
92. Are there other divisions/ departments that should be included?
93. Are there others in similar positions with needs like yours that I should be speaking with?

Closing Questions.

Don't be afraid to ask for the business. As Wayne Gretzky has said "you miss 100% of the shots you don't take!"

94. Where do we go from here?
95. What would you like to do next?
96. Can we schedule your deliver dates now?
97. How is next Tuesday for your first shipment?
98. Can you see any reason not to -----?
99. Is there any additional information you need to decide?
100. Can you see any reason not to proceed?
101. Is there anything else (more) you need to know?
102. How soon can we begin?
103. Is it better to start immediately, or wait for the first of the month?
104. If you get the offer tomorrow, can I call Thursday at 3 for approval?
105. Can we get started?