

The Power of Questions

Ten reasons you need to become a master questioner

Editor's Note: In this column space of *Vet-Advantage*, we will give you insight into both basic and advanced tactical selling techniques that will help you serve customers better than ever before. But let us preface this with a warning. The material in these articles is not for salespeople who are not ready to push themselves harder than ever before. It is for the professional who seeks constant improvement, fresh ways to serve customers, and constant learners who are never satisfied with being average. If this is you, it's great to have you on board. Now let's get to work!

In the mid-90s, the company I worked for asked me and two other associates to put together a new sales training program to be rolled out to the entire organization. I believed in the material in this program and felt that it was vital to the continued success of the company. After being promoted to Regional Sales Manager, I felt that it was my duty to make sure every employee I touched communicated effectively. The only problem was that while I was



feel when you sit in that car seat next to them and tell them all the reasons why this program is so important to the company, without ever really finding out what they think about it?"

It was that day I realized that leadership is sales. The same skills needed to engage a customer are the same skills needed to engage an associate. It's not about telling the "customer" what they need to hear. It's about using your greatest weapon of influence to

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jamming the program down their throats, I was breaking every communication's principle I was teaching. The more I "sold" the program, the more people felt like they were being sold.

Then one day, as my frustration reached a peak, I sought out one of the most respected leaders in the company, a fellow named Dave Reddig. I approached Dave with this, "Dave, why are people so resistant to the program? Don't they understand that it will make them better?" Dave responded with, "How do you think people

move people toward you. That weapon is...**QUESTIONS.** Why Ask Questions? Here are 10 reasons why.

No. 1: Questions get them to tell you what they want and need

Average and below-average leaders TELL the people they are leading what they should want and need. The PRECISE Leader instead asks the employee what they want and need, and then delivers their coaching focused on fulfilling those wants and needs.

No. 2: Questions isolate real issues from bogus ones

Average and below-average managers spend too much time solving the wrong employee issues. They make too many assumptions as a result of asking too few questions. As a result, they deliver the wrong feedback and coaching. The next time an associate comes to you with an issue, FIRST understand that the problem he is coming with is NOT the real issue. There is another one that is waiting for YOU to uncover. Be patient, ask more questions, and you will uncover the problem BEHIND the problem.

No. 3: Questions reduce resistance

How do you feel when somebody is telling you what to do? Do you stand firm and keep your walls up? Do you have a tendency to be skeptical of what that person says to you? Remember, statements cause resistance. Questions, on the other hand, allow others to express themselves. When their lips are moving and yours are not, the “coaching” environment changes.

No. 4: Questions make employees feel in control

People feel in control when they are talking. When you ask questions of your employees, you are inviting them to talk. The more they talk, the more in control they feel. The more in control they feel, the more comfortable they are, and the more willing they will be to bring down the defenses that make it difficult for you to do your job.

No. 5: Questions give the leader control

Lawyers are notorious for manipulating their witnesses with questioning techniques. If you had the opportunity to watch some of the infamous Casey Anthony case, you saw how good some attorneys are at subtly “leading” a witness. The

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key word here is subtle. The most successful attorneys are ones that empathetically question their witness, get them to share information, and then help lead them to the attorney’s predetermined conclusion.

No. 6: Questions get them fired up

When great leaders, speakers and motivators want to get their audience fired up, they do it by asking a question that demands a response. Evangelical ministers are masters at using questions to stir emotions in their congregations. If you ever have attended one of these services or have seen one on TV, you know that when the pastor asks, “Can I get an amen?” The response is usually a resounding, “AMEN.” If that pastor wants to stir just a little more emotion, he will ask again. “I said...can I get an AMEN!” If he has to ask twice, watch out, that second amen will blow the doors off heaven.

No. 7: Questions allow employees to sell themselves

Leader: “How do YOU think we can make the team more productive?”

Employee: “Well, I really think it would save us tons of time and ...”

Your employees can sell themselves even better than you can sell them ... if you let them. Ask them a question that allows them to tell you how and why something can be improved. And watch how their conclusions are often exactly what you were thinking and feeling. But because they “thought” of it, they own it. And if they own it, you don’t have to “sell” them on anything ... because they sold themselves.

No. 8: Questions prepare them to sell to others

While you may be the leader of your team, there are Captains that make up the team when you are not around. These Captains often carry major influence with the team and are extremely important in the successful implementation of your message. Make it a habit to ask them questions that will better prepare THEM to deliver YOUR message when you are not around.

Leader: “Mike, what part of our solution do you think will resonate most with the team?”



they know more than the next guy. That may be the case; it may not. So don't assume you know the best way to handle everything. Believe, and expect that the person or team you are coaching has input that you never considered. By believing that the person you coach is as smart as you, you will be more inclined to ask more and deeper questions.

No. 10: Questioning yourself will give you confidence

Confidence is essential in communication, and the first person that needs to be sold on an idea or corporate directive is you. So before you ever

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Captain: “Well, while I think they may initially be skeptical, I think if we remind them how it will make our lives easier, they will buy into it.

Leader: “Mike, how do you think it will make our lives easier?”

The more the Captain talks, the more he is selling himself. Don't be surprised if he gives a better rendition of the presentation than even you!

No. 9: Questions may get you better answers

A common mistake amongst rookie managers is that they believe that they have been given a leadership role because

enter the team meeting or individual coaching session, ask yourself the questions that your employees might ask you. Play devil's advocate in as many ways as possible. If you don't have the answers to your own questions, find them. Once you are able to answer most of your own questions, you will then feel more certain in your mission.

So this month, stop making so many statements and start asking more questions. By understanding and using your greatest weapon of influence you will no longer be a Supervisor, Manager, Director, VP or CEO. You will now be called Leader by the people who matter most. ■

Brian Sullivan, CSP teaches salespeople and leaders how to influence more people in his PRECISE Business Development Programs. Sign up for a FREE Online Training Module on How to Become a Master Questioner by going to www.precisesellingonline.com. Or visit him at www.preciseselling.com.