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Finding Gold

Questions - The Shortest Path from Prospect to Client

By Michael Lovas and Pam Holloway

April 1, 2010

NOTE: Pam and I are psychologists, so, we ask a lot of questions. As business psychologists, we ask different questions. As trainers and coaches, we teach professionals the right way to ask questions. This is truly a vital skill. Your ability to ask the right questions at the right time determines the degree of receptivity you'll get from your prospects. The key to your sales success is NOT your ability to explain your products; it IS your ability to ask questions!

Why Use Questions?

You want to use questions because they work! Asking the right *kind* of question at the right time can get people to listen to you, when they wouldn't otherwise want to. Learn to ask the right questions, and you can turn a negative situation into a positive one. And, while those are all positive outcomes, here's one even better - the person who asks the questions controls the situation.

If you're only using the basic fact-finding questions, you're losing a huge opportunity to improve results! If you're asking those big, open-ended questions, you could be shooting yourself in the foot. But, for now, let's look at why you should care to ask the right questions at the right time.

What Do Questions Do for You?

1. Questions help build rapport and trust. They show people you're listening to them and are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Questions provide a perfect way to introduce yourself, your services and tie those services directly to what matters most to your client.
2. Questions help people self-discover you. This is a critically important variable in the effectiveness of any communication. Simply telling me about a feature or benefit will have far less influence on me than if I discover it myself. Questions enable the self-discovery process. They get people to persuade themselves, and research shows that approach to be most effective. The bottom line - People believe what *they* say not what *you* say. But, changes are slim that they'd say it unless you ask the right questions to give them the opportunity.
3. Questions help keep you focused. Questions lead to quality listening. They make it easier for you to concentrate on what's most important in the situation, and they help keep you focused. When you focus on the answers, it's much easier to see opportunities to ask follow-up questions.
4. Questions enhance your credibility. They make you look smart, self-confident, interesting and interested in who you're talking to. They give you an opportunity to show your wisdom, expertise and experience without pontificating or running off at the mouth.

How Do Questions Work?

What is it about questions that makes them so effective? In order to understand how questions work, let's look at what happens in our brains when someone asks us a question.

1. We are compelled to answer. There's something in our makeup as humans that causes a sort of automatic answering reflex to kick in the instant we hear a question. It's related to our need for completion. A question is like a joke without a punch line. It's incomplete without an answer, and the other person starts to fill in the blanks to complete it..

Warning: The question must be the right kind of question, asked at the right time. Otherwise, you risk invading the prospect's personal space.

2. Questions stimulate the brain. Using PET scans, researchers have discovered that questions stimulate the new brain or neocortex. Larry Wilson, author and founder of Pecos River Training explains, "Our old brain that's been around for millions of years, is the part that runs by instinct.

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That's the part that animals have. They don't ask questions. The purpose of our 'new brain' is to override and challenge our old brain and we do that by asking questions."

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3. Questions get through a person's mental filters and defense mechanisms. Each of us has a unique set of mental filters through which we see the world and filter incoming information. That information is either retained, deleted or changed. Questions help you increase the odds your messages get accepted and retained. They accomplish this in two ways:

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1. Answers to your questions help you determine the other person's mental filter configuration so that you can talk in that person's natural "language."
2. Questions help you build rapport and trust which directly effect what gets received, and what gets deleted.

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Warning: The question must be the right kind of question, asked at the right time. Otherwise, you risk getting deleted.

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Dialogue vs Information

Given a choice between having a dialog or getting information, the dialog wins every time. That's because the more open the dialog, the better the relationship between you two. Without that, the information is meaningless.

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People often ask us: "What's THE question you want to ask your prospects?" Or they'll ask about a particular question. "What do you think about this question - 'What's important to you about _____.'"

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What's the Best Question?

There is no such thing as THE one question that will get your clients to open up or trust you. It doesn't work that way. Additionally, you cannot use a scripted set of questions with every prospect in every situation.

Asking questions in a business situation is truly *an Art and a Science*. It's an Art in terms of knowing what to ask and when. That's based on the other person. It's a science from the standpoint of why you use questions - how they work and what happens in the brain.

Long-answer vs Short-answer Questions

Most salespeople have been taught to use open-ended questions, the ones that elicit a long answer. The idea is to get people talking and involved. "What are your goals for your retirement...What do you want to leave as a legacy for your heirs?" Unfortunately, sometimes those long-answer questions are too open, too big, too invasive. Far too often, producers ask them too early in the conversation - before they have earned the right to ask them.

Pam and I teach our clients to think in terms of adding points to an account. Call them "Connectivity Points." You have to visualize the new relationship with that prospect as a path. Each additional step gives you a point. But, points can be taken away by asking the wrong question at the wrong time. Asking open-ended questions too soon can easily detract from your relationship and credibility. Open-ended questions definitely have a place, but the key is to ask them at the right time.

Before your clients will trust you enough to answer a question that starts with "what's important to you about _____?" they must perceive you as safe, credible and trustworthy. Opening your conversations with such an open-ended question does little to establish your safety, which is key to establishing credibility, which is key to establishing trust.

The Strategy

If I come into your home as a stranger and begin asking questions, what questions would you feel most comfortable with first? They are questions that require a short answer. They're questions that elicit a Yes or No answer. Once you sense that the prospect is freely and comfortably answering those questions, you've gained enough points to ask questions that require a longer answer. Those are based on What and How. If you can methodically build your conversation to that point, you will have the highest probability of turning that prospect into a client.

Your Reward!

If you like what you just read about questions, then you will certainly want to read our free white paper: "The Producer's Guide to Asking Questions." To get your copy, just copy this paragraph into an email, along with your contact information, and send it to me at: michael@aboutpeople.com. I'll personally send the Guide to you. This Reward expires on June 1, 2010.

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Michael speaks at conferences and seminars in Canada and the US. He is an inspiring trainer and coach who helps advisors improve their businesses. He holds three prestigious certifications: Licensed Master Practitioner of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), Licensed Trainer of NLP; and Clinical Hypnotherapist. They make Michael an expert at helping financial professionals succeed at a higher level by building more meaningful business relationships.

AboutPeople Books:

1. **(NEW) Axis of Influence!** - How credibility & likeability intersect to drive success!
2. **(NEW) Words that Sell** - The language of psychological marketing & selling
3. **Face Values** - How to read people and connect with them in less than 3 minutes!
4. **The Boomer Report** - The financial advisor's guide to understanding the boomer mind
5. **Presentation Magic** - How to gain a psychological advantage in your seminars and sales presentations
6. **The 5 Levels of Rapport** - How to create a meaningful connection with people who are important to you
7. **Magnetic Connections** - Consultative selling for financial professionals
8. **IDENTITY** - How to create and deliver the most important statement of your business life
9. **Inside the Mind of the Senior Market**
10. **Beyond Wave Marketing** - How to add credibility to your relationship marketing

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