



Consultative Questions: Understanding The Business Priorities

OVERVIEW

Questions are a powerful tool that allows you to gain insight to the client's situation, problem and potential cures. In order to sell strategically and consultatively, you must become accustomed to asking well phrased, thought penetrating questions. More importantly, you must prepare questions in advance of the meeting.

Studies have shown that a well-phrased question will get the client to think about what you are saying and their situation better than your making a statement. The question forces the client to think and gains their attention. The well-phrased question cuts through all the clutter that is swirling around in their head. Questions also get the client to tell you their biases, preferences and even things they may not be consciously aware of. The question is part of an overall strategy that helps you change the game without the competition even being aware that the game changed. In addition, by asking great questions, the client cannot help but think of you differently, someone who is more consultative, and more experienced.

Every sales person, consultant, advisor, sales support person and executive should have a set of questions that are to be asked in various client situations. No one question or set of questions fits all situations. The questions that follow will stimulate your thinking and help you design your own questions for the client and specific the sales situation.

QUESTION TYPE: OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS

The objectives in these series of questions are to understand the client's operational characteristics. Operational characteristics come down to the achievement of some criteria usually in the form of a metric or measurement. These questions demonstrate your knowledge of the industry. And it demonstrates to your audience your ability to think and act strategically. In



other words, these series of questions show you are smart and not just trying to sell something or push a preconceived solution.

These questions can be used by external and internal account managers, consultants or other professionals on the organization as a whole or within subdivisions and business units.

1. In your industry, how would you characterize the top players?
2. How is your company perceived in the industry today?
3. How is your company (business unit) attempting to change the game?
4. What are the key factors that impact your earnings per share? (In some cases you should know this, so be careful. Your question may be better phrased as "We see these as the key factors impacting EPS, how do you view these relative to your company?")
5. How would you characterize your ability to monitor the metrics supporting these?
6. Does each business unit have their own key performance indicators?
7. What parts of the business are key growth targets for the year? (May substitute services, products, solutions, country, etc.)
8. How do you measure customer profitability?
9. How are you cross-selling customers?
10. How loyal is your customer base? (Are there opportunities for repeat business transactions, recurring revenue, etc?)
11. How are the business units tracking to the key financial goals of the company?
12. What is your current Days Sales Outstanding? (Or "I see your DSO is XX, what is your target for this year?")
13. How are you leveraging information technology to support your business initiatives?
14. How is information technology being leveraged in your company today? Is it a defensive approach (costs) or offensive approach (revenue driving, market share improvement, etc.)?
15. You have acquired XX Company, how is that impacting your organization? Are there integration issues? Are there customer issues? (employee, product, manufacturing, etc. issues?)
16. How large is your IT staff? What is the current budget? (Substitute the business area your solution addresses)
17. How are your IT projects approved? (Substitute the business area your solution addresses)



18. How are you measuring these areas in terms of performance?
19. How are these areas performing relative to performance objectives?
20. What areas are you responsible for?
21. How is what you do, impact these other areas (name the areas you are targeting)?

From the questions above, you are attempting to get a view into the operations and the how the company measures performance. You must tie your solution to the improvement of these measures and/or bring new measures into the company that they are not currently addressing.

If your solution is strategic, is a big ticket item, or involves multiple people in the organization to make the decision, your strategy must be to tie the solution back to the top business priorities and the key performance metrics.

You will have to ask these questions (or a subset) of multiple people who are involved in the use of your solution. Through the use of these questions, you can begin to tie your solution to the key performance metrics which in turn support the business priorities of the company.

