



Consultative Questions: Determining Where You Stand Competitively

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: COMPETITIVE SELLING QUESTIONS

These questions allow you to find out where you stand competitively. Depending on the nature of your solution and your audience, you will want to tailor these questions to fit the personality of the industry, the people and the region of the world you are selling or consulting to.

The answers to these questions are important, for they will tell you about your probability of landing the business. Often the answers to these questions will also tell you where you are



falling short. Prospective clients do not volunteer this information. The questions need to be asked because there is no use for you and your team to begin building a solution where there is a low potential and a low probability of making sale.

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. Based upon what we described as our solution, what do you think our shortcomings are?
2. Knowing that we have no experience in this particular area, how is that going to affect the weighting of the criteria (or how we are viewed)in your mind?
3. If you had to rank our company compared to the competitors, where are we? How do we stack up?
4. If you had to make a decision today, would we be selected?
5. If you had to narrow this down to two providers, would we be in the top two?
6. Who do you believe in the buying committee are advocates of our solution?
7. Who are our detractors in the buying committee?
8. If you could change one thing about our proposal/approach/solution, what would it be?
9. What do we need to address in our approach/solution that would put us on top?
10. What company is leading in terms of solution in your mind right now?

By asking these questions, you are identifying issues that you need to address in your solution. You may find that you are so far behind in terms of being qualified to address the needs that the client has laid out, that you cannot catch up. You cannot afford the time, energy and effort to build a proposal that is a sure loser.

If you find you cannot meet the needs of the buyer, you can gracefully bow out of the competition. By doing this you will be viewed by the client as having the integrity of trying to something you cannot. By bowing out gracefully, you increase the chances that you will be in their minds for future business in which you can perform and address better.

It is critical you find these out now, before delivering the final proposal, rather than in a post-mortem review of why you lost.

