



How To Ask The Right Questions With Your Prospect To Unearth Their Needs & Wants

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Hello and welcome to another MTD Sales Training tip. In this session we're going to discuss how you can ask the right questions to unearth the wants and needs of your prospect.

Sell solutions! Be a solutions provider! It seems every sales person in the world wants to sell solutions. However, we've found that not many actually understand how to do this. How do you actually sell a solution?

Better yet, here's a question....exactly what is a solution?

Well, let's turn to a reliable dictionary and find out exactly what a solution is first of all...

Collins English Dictionary defines the word solution as:

An action or process of solving a problem

And also

An answer to a problem...

So if a solution is the answer to a problem then to sell solutions means that you're providing the answers to the problems.

However, this also means that before you can possibly sell a solution, there first must be a problem, right?

No problem...no solution.

A solution is the answer to a problem and therefore, before you can sell a solution, you have to identify a problem first. If you wish to become a solutions provider and business advisor to your clients, you must first uncover the problem or problems and help alert the buyer to them or to work through them together.

So, What's the Problem?

Well, frankly, the problem is the problem!

Most sales people have difficulty identifying or uncovering the prospect's problems they struggle to ask the right questions to uncover the problems and if you cannot find the problems, you cannot identify the needs or wants and therefore you have no solution.

No matter how great you feel your product or service is, unless there is a need or a desire... it's worthless.

You must learn to ask the proper questions to help unearth the prospect's problems, thereby exposing the need to present the solutions. You must uncover and clearly identify the prospect's problems to expose the prospect's needs and wants.

So let's show you exactly how to ask the right questions, those powerful questions that will help you to unearth the prospects problems. As always, what follows is not a script and it will require some work from you.

First, let's make something perfectly clear. Benefits are not solutions.

Sales people often believe that because their product or service has many benefits to the customer that they are solutions. But they are not.

A benefit is only a solution if it solves a problem and thereby filling a need. Let's give you a ridiculous, but very clear example of what we mean about the difference between a benefit and a solution.

Let's say I came to you and I had a gigantic cork. Like from a wine bottle. It's huge...about the size of a small car. I come and I want to sell you this cork. Would you buy the cork for £10,000? Probably not. How about £1,000? No. In fact, you would have no interest in the cork.

But then I begin to tell you the benefits of the cork: the cork looks nice. It can float. It's very big and can be seen from afar and it's light in colour and can be seen in the dark. Those are all benefits of the cork.

But you're still not interested and that's because you have no need for a cork or the benefits it offers. You have no need because you have no problem that the cork can solve.

However, now suppose you were shipwrecked in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. You were alone and there was no help in sight. I come along in a small raft and although I cannot rescue you, I offer to sell you this cork. Would you be interested then? Absolutely. In fact, you would be willing to pay £100,000 or more for that cork without question.

Now, did the benefits that the cork offered change?

No they did not.

But now you have a problem...a big one. The cork can solve that problem and therefore you now have a NEED for the cork.

Unfortunately, finding out your prospect's problems is usually not that easy. While sometimes the prospect is aware of their problems or at least to some degree, often the prospect is having problems for which they are not even aware of. The prospect is suffering from troubles they don't even know exist. And making it worse is the fact that most of the time the prospect isn't very

open minded to hearing or learning about the problem too. Often the prospect doesn't want to know that they have a problem – that's just human nature and the way it is.

In addition, the prospect - after learning of the problem - may remain in denial about it because to admit that you have a problem and that you didn't know about it can be difficult for some people to take.

Therefore, to expose the need for your product or service, you - the solutions provider - must uncover the prospect's troubles and problems, and help them to clearly see, understand and accept them. And we're going to give you a systematic method to accomplish this.

You'll notice that I'm using the terms "uncover" and "unearth" problems. This is because there are three ways problems can come to light in a sales interaction.

1. You can create, make up or invent problems that do not really exist
2. You can confirm problems that the prospect is already aware of and
3. You can uncover problems the prospect is unaware of

The first is to invent or conjure up problems that don't exist. This is totally unethical and you shouldn't even go there.

The second way to unearth problems is to confirm them. This is a good thing, but it is often not enough to motivate people to take action. In other words, when the prospect is completely aware of a problem, they're already aware of the need. Now when you come along and confirm the problem and the need it does not really change the situation.

As an example let's say a business owner is losing money on heating costs. He knows this and has known it for years. He's not yet taken action to fix the problem, even though approached by several sales people. You then merely confirm the situation for which the prospect has apparently decided is not a problem worthy of paying money to fix.

Now when you're able to sell your solution to this type of prospect, that's nice but you are to the prospect is a sales person and there's nothing wrong with that. However, you need to be a lot more to them, consider this:

When you're able to not only confirm the prospect's problems, but also uncover other problems which the prospect had no idea they had. When you can do this, now you have exposed a deeper need and you become a true solutions provider and trusted advisor to the client and that's where you need to be.

So, let's begin on how to ask the right questions to unearth the prospect's problems, to expose needs and desires to sell solutions, and to become a solutions provider and trusted advisor.

We're going to give you a 6 step method to accomplish this mission. It's a process that will not only help uncover problems but will help the prospect better understand and accept them. As we mentioned earlier, this will take a little bit of study and some practice, but once you get it ...you'll be flying!

The first 3 steps are what you'll do before the sales interaction in your planning and preparation and the final 3 steps are what you will do within the sales interaction.

Let's take a closer look...

Step 1 in your planning and preparation is that you must intimately *know and understand* all of the Benefits of what you sell. You must clearly *know* every benefit your product or service offers. You must understand everything the prospect will receive from making a positive buying decision. So write all of these benefits down on a piece of paper. Think about direct and indirect benefits – get them all down.

Step 2 is to now Reverse Engineer those Benefits. Now, take every benefit that you offer, and turn it around, reverse it. That is, take the *flipside* of that benefit. If the benefit provides something positive to the prospect, then without that benefit, the prospect must be experiencing something negative. Does that make sense?

For example, if one benefit of your service is that the client will receive more website traffic, then *without* your service, the prospect must receive *less* website traffic. Whatever benefit the customer gets from *having* your service, they are *losing* the equivalent *without* your service. Consider all of the benefits and reverse them.

Again, this is information you need to know first-hand. You need to have this knowledge in your head and be ready to use each reversed benefit at the correct time. So on your piece of paper next to each benefit, write down the flipside of that benefit.

Here's an important note on this step. Remember that the benefits must be *actual* benefits and not what you *think* or *wish* the benefits are. As with the example of the prospect with the website, you say your service will increase web traffic. Well, keep in mind that that is only a benefit IF the prospect has a NEED for more web traffic.

If the prospect already has more web traffic and leads than they can handle, then even though your service can increase traffic, it is not a true benefit for the prospect and therefore not a solution.

Ok, onto step 3; You must now understand that every Reverse Benefit is a Problem the prospect is having. Now begin to see how every reverse benefit is a potential problem for the prospect, and present those *problems* by asking questions. You're going to ask questions which will become obvious to you, and present them based on the reverse benefits.

Start to write down questions that you can potentially ask to your prospect to unearth those problem areas. Once again, like with everything that we recommend we don't want you to script things out and look robotic. These questions are to have in your mind for when the time is right within your sales interaction.

So you're going to pull out these problems by asking questions. You'll ask questions that will help the prospect see the problems. Even though you may be aware of the problems that the prospect is having and they're oblivious to them, you cannot simply tell the prospect of their problems and woes. To persuade and to teach you cannot TELL, you must ASK. You'll ask questions which when the prospect answers, he or she will then see the problem for themselves.

So you've done your planning and preparation in terms of understanding the benefits your solution has to offer, you've reversed engineered those benefits and you've now got some questions in your mind that will enable you to pull out those problems from the prospect.

Now it's time for the sales interaction and step 4 where you will now Reveal, Clarify and Confirm the Problems. Your questions will uncover the problems. Now, make sure those problems are clear and that the prospect agrees that they are indeed real problems.

You must get confirmation from the prospect as to the validity of the problems. The prospect may already know and understand some problems, but you must make sure that every problem is clear and that the prospect agrees. And you'll ask questions to do this as well.

Step 5 is where you need to assign a value to the problem or problems. You must now try to put a monetary value on the problem. In some cases, especially with selling intangibles this may be difficult. But you must attempt to assign some relative costs or equivalent value with the problem. If you do this step correctly, you should never get a price objection.

And finally, in Step 6 you will Present your Solutions to Those Problems.

Let's put this whole process together. I'm going to give you two examples of a sales interaction. In the first example, our hypothetical sales person will use the conventional approach. That is the *Push-the-Benefits* approach. In the second example, the sales person will use the *Pull-out-Problems* solution.

Both sales people sell an internet-connected photocopier that does everything except make the tea! The machine offers a ton of benefits to potential buyers. The prospect runs a small sales company and has several sales people who work remotely.

With this, sales person Number One immediately sees a few benefits to push and does so...

Listen...

Benefits Sales Person:

"So James, our XJ-2000 will allow your sales people, even those who work from home, to print their files directly to the office with the click of a mouse! Your people will have access to each other's documents without the use of your intranet. They can share files and instantly see all of the proposals. And one of the biggest benefits is that with the XJ-2000, all of the documents are available right away for everyone on the team. Isn't that great?!"

The prospect hears these great benefits, but it does nothing. The sales person educated the prospect as to the capabilities of the machine. However, since the prospect does not see a problem...she does not see a NEED for a solution---the product.

Another thing to add about this all too common approach is this...the selling benefits approach...is logical. When you explain all of the great benefits as in that example, it presents a logical mind set in the prospect.

The idea is that once the prospect can see all the benefits, then he or she should come to the logical conclusion to buy the product in order to enjoy the benefits.

The problem is that people make buying decisions based primarily on emotion, not logic. It is the emotion that prompts people to take action. Buyers then back up, or justify the decision with logic. When you preach and push benefits, it educates the prospect to the logical reasoning but will usually not create enough emotion to buy.

Now let's listen to the next example with our sales person who understands the PULL method of asking the right questions to uncover problems. Listen to how the sales person will use the exact same benefits...but differently...

Solutions Provider: "James, exactly how do your remote employees send in their reports and documents *now*?"

"Well, they all have a printer and fax machine, so they print their docs out in hard copy, and then fax them to the office."

Solutions Provider: "So, every member of the team, I think you said 37 of them, each has his or her own separate printer *and* fax machine, all supplied by the company?"

"Ah, well, yeah. I know it's expensive, especially when they have problems with the equipment, but...anyway, what can you do?"

Solutions Provider: "Yes, James, I can imagine the equipment and maintenance costs are very high. But what about the actual *printing costs* and the *time* it takes for each to deliver their reports every week, or month?"

Prospect: "Yeah, there's that too."

Solutions Provider: "So, then each sales person has to print a hard copy, then take the time to fax them as well, and you know how often faxes fail. About how many pages are we talking about per week, per worker?"

Prospect: "Ah, uhm, let me see. I never really thought about it. I'd say each runs about 60 to 75 pages of reports every week; and now that you mention it, that is a lot."

Solutions Provider: "So, we're easily talking about 2,500 pages remotely and then double that when they reprint the faxes at the office---that's over 5,000 pages a week! Not to mention all the time that takes. James I'd say that's a serious amount of money and it's a costly problem, wouldn't you agree?"

Prospect: "Oh yeah. It's killing us and I hadn't really considered that."

Solutions Provider: "Have you ever estimated what that cost actually is?"

Prospect: "Well printing costs are low...I mean I have a good deal with our supplier...I don't know, maybe each report might run up about £3."

Solutions Provider: "Ok. So if we add each sales person's time, we could be talking about, conservatively, £800 or £900 a month, just for reports? Does that sound about right?"

Prospect: "Yeah, that sounds right."

Solutions Provider: "Also, how are the sales team able to share their findings? I mean how does each person know what proposals are on the table?"

Prospect: "Ah, well, actually they can't right now. We're looking at upgrading our intranet so they can do that"

Solutions Provider: "So, is it possible that because they are unable to properly and timely share proposals, that they lose a few contracts?"

Prospect: "Now that you mention it, I guess so, but it can't be that many."

Solutions Provider: "I hope not. But how much does your average client pay you? I mean what is the average contract worth per year?"

Prospect: "Oh, average. I'd say about £12,000"

Solutions Provider: "Ok, James, our XJ-2000 completely eliminates those problems..."

Let's look at this process again, but this time I'll break it down...

First, our solutions provider takes one of the same benefits the first sales person pushed, in that the prospect's sales people will be able to print their proposals and documents directly to the office. However, instead of pushing the benefit, she reverses it and begins to ask questions around the fact that without the product there are problems.

Solutions Provider: "James, exactly how do your remote employees send in their reports and documents *now*?"

Prospect: "Well, they all have a printer and fax machine, so they print their docs out in hard copy, and then fax them to the office."

The provider then continues to dig into the problem...

Solutions Provider: "So, every member of the team, I think you said 37 of them, each has his or her own separate printer *and* fax machine, all supplied by the company?"

Prospect: "Ah, well, yeah. I know it's expensive, especially when they have problems with the equipment, but...anyway, what can you do?"

So the prospect is beginning to see the problem for themselves.

The provider continues to expand on the problem.

Solutions Provider: "Yes, James, I can imagine the equipment and maintenance costs are very high. But what about the actual *printing costs* and the *time* it takes for each to deliver their reports every week, or month?"

Prospect: "Yeah, there's that too."

Solutions Provider: "So, then each sales person has to print a hard copy, then take the time to fax them as well, and you know how often faxes fail. About how many pages are we talking about per week, per worker?"

Prospect: "Ah, uhm, let me see. I never really thought about it. I'd say each runs about 60 to 75 pages of reports every week; and now that you mention it, that is a lot."

The provider has now uncovered a problem the prospect did not know they had.

Solutions Provider: "So, we're easily talking about 2,500 pages remotely and then double that when they reprint the faxes at the office---that's over 5,000 pages a week! Not to mention all the time that takes. James, I'd say that's a serious amount of money and it's a costly problem, wouldn't you agree?"

So the provider clarifies and confirms the problem. She makes sure the prospect agrees. She then assigns a monetary figure to the problem.

Prospect: "Oh yeah. It's killing us and I hadn't really considered that."

Solutions Provider: "Have you ever estimated what that cost actually is?"

Prospect: "Well printing costs are low...I mean I have a good deal with our supplier...I don't know, maybe each report might run up about £3."

Solutions Provider: "Ok. So if we add each sales person time, we could be talking about, conservatively, £800 or £900 a month, just for reports? Does that sound about right?"

Prospect: "Yeah, that's sound right."

The provider moves on to yet another benefit but also reverses it and goes through the same process.

Solutions Provider: "Also, how are the sales team able to share their findings? I mean how does each person know what proposals are on the table?"

Prospect: "Ah, well, actually they can't right now. We are looking at upgrading our intranet so they can do that."

Solutions Provider: "So, is it possible that because they are unable to properly and timely share proposals, that they lose a few contracts?"

Prospect: "Now that you mention it, I guess so, but it can't be that many."

There the provider has unearthed another problem, which the prospect was unaware of, and...

Solutions Provider: "I hope not. But how much does your average client pay you? I mean what is the average contract worth per year?"

Prospect: "Oh, average. I'd say about £12,000"

The provider again puts a number on the problem!

Solutions Provider: "Ok, James, our XJ-2000 completely eliminates those problems..."

So by uncovering the problems, the provider has exposed a lot of pain that the prospect came out with themselves. And this has clearly fired up the emotions in the prospect.

This prospect is ready for a solution.

So we hope you get the idea with this?

Once again the questions and scenario that we've used are to illustrate the point. You'll sound a lot more natural yourself and only use the questions and terminology that you're comfortable with.

So let's review:

1. *Know* the benefits
2. Reverse the benefits
3. Every reversal uncovers a problem
4. Clarify and confirm the problem
5. Assign value to the problem and
6. Sell solution to the problem

Remember, don't push the benefits...pull out the problems first, quantify the problems and then present your solution to overcome those problems.

We'll see you again soon for some more MTD Sales Training tips.

About Us



MTD, the sales training specialists, has been working with a wide variety of clients (both large and small) in the UK and internationally since 2001.

Since that time we have delivered training in over 23 different countries to over 2,000 different organisations.

Our head offices are based in the Midlands where we have our very own training centre, including a multi-media suite that enables us to provide a full range of blended learning solutions including video, podcasts, e-learning and online support solutions.

We specialise in providing:

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- Open courses (Delivered throughout the UK at various locations)
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- Blended learning solutions (online and offline)
- Sales coaching (With Sales Directors or Sales Executives)

Our team of highly skilled and experienced trainers and consultants have all had distinguished careers in senior sales roles and bring with them a wealth of practical experience to each course. At MTD Training we will design and deliver a solution that suits your specific needs addressing the issues and requirements from your training brief that best fits your culture, learning style and ways of working.

Our Key Unique Selling Point

“Bespoke, practical and quality training delivered by a trainer experienced in your industry is a “given”. Where we really make a difference is how we help your sales peoples to embed and implement the learning after the course. We offer industry leading post course support to make this happen so you get a real, tangible return on your investment”



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