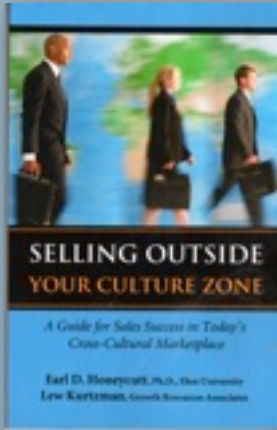


Changing Times



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by Lew Kurtzman and Dr. Earl Honeycutt
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Ask Your Way to the Sale Questions that Sell

How often do salespeople jump right into a product presentation before asking questions? Typically, the buyer asks an initial question and the salesperson lunges right into his or her presentation. It's quite common for a buyer to ask the seller to tell him or her what is new or what is the latest product enhancements. That's an open invitation to pitch the features and benefits of the "latest and greatest." It's also the tempting bait for a sales bomb. Without knowing about your customer's **criteria, preferences, motives** and **concerns**, your presentation is apt to miss the mark.

The Problem

Sales is the process of helping people solve problems through products and services. Nonetheless, people are conditioned to provide answers to questions. What school gives top grades to those students that ask the best questions? Western society places great emphasis on speaking and expressing oneself. As a result, we feel the need to tell what we know.

Sales people are usually well trained in the specifications and attributes of their respective products. This is, indeed, important. But if the product features don't match the buyer's criteria or preferences, they are hardly benefits.

So how do salespeople know what product features fit a particular customer's specific requirements? Asking questions. Without doubt, questioning demands discipline and skill.

The Solution

Learning questioning skills is like learning to lead an orchestra. Knowing what question to ask at the right moment will direct a sales discussion. Like musical instruments, questions have different purposes in the mix. Some questions are used to sort out facts, while others bring out emotions and opinions. Certain questions are easy to answer. Others are meant to be thought provoking. There are questions that reveal sensitive issues, yet are important for vital information. Many questions are meant to expand on subjects and others enable the salesperson to quench a long winded explanation.

Like unpeeling the layers of an onion, questions can lead to the innermost causes of problems. Starting with the outside layer, the degree of sensitivity becomes higher towards the center. Questioning skills enable sales professionals to help customers to uncover hidden or potential problems.

The GRA Sales Tale, *The Yellow Buggy*, provides a classic lesson of how a true professional made a near impossible sale using his razor-sharp questioning skills.

Read the *Yellow Buggy*, at:

<http://www.grasolutions.com/SalesTales.html>

**"I don't learn anything by telling.
Only by asking."**

Lou Holtz

“This was my third sales oriented training program and, without a doubt, it was the most useful.”

Veteran lab instrumentation sales professional

Questioning Skills

Degree of Sensitivity

Questions can be powerful. They put the emphasis on the buyer and open the sales discussion to a realm of facts, ideas, opinions and emotions. But questions can create tension if asked inappropriately or in the wrong sequence.

Imagine a sales person starting out by asking a buyer about how much money he has to spend. Most buyers are sensitive about talking about money early in the discussion. It's an early warning sign that the salesperson is going to try to get as much of that money as possible.

The first skill of questioning is to get the buyer comfortable. When people are comfortable, they are more apt to be open and honest. Questioning a defensive customer is futile. Often it results in dead-ends and stonewalling.

Asking for permission to ask questions is a simple, non-threatening way of setting the agenda. It asks the buyer for the green light to move ahead. Asking permission shows respect and implies that you are interested in him or her. In instances where proprietary information may not be discussed, you may acknowledge that you understand and you will be mindful of the stipulations.

Factual Questions

To make a targeted presentation you need facts. *What is the existing situation? How many people are involved? What are the obstacles?* The answer to these questions provide information about the current situation.

Feeling Questions

People buy things for different reasons. Buyers have personal **preferences** and **motives** when making a decision. Feeling questions bring out opinions, values, and sometimes, concerns. Asking a buyer how he or she feels about something reveals the buyer's desires and fears. This information is vital for a targeted presentation. Comparing the facts with the feelings enables you to clearly define

problems. Problems are defined by what exists vs. an improved situation.

However, problems alone are not always severe enough to make a change. Even though you may not feel ill, you may have a condition brewing that needs medical attention. Quite often the buyer doesn't feel the intensity of a problem and therefore there's no impetus to do anything to make changes.

Expansion Questions

Intensifying buyers' perceptions of a problem is done through questions that allow them to express their thoughts and emotions verbally. Questions like; *Could you give me an example(?)*, or, *Could you tell me more about that(?)*, will reveal many personal preferences, motives and concerns. The answers to expansion questions often helps to crystalize the problem in the mind of the buyer - key to outcome of your sales interaction.

Hypothetical Questions

When a customer is apprehensive about agreeing to purchase, it may be because the consequences of not buying are not realized. It is the salesperson's obligation to ask about what might happen if a problem is left unsolved. Prevention is a powerful reason for avoiding a potential disaster. Questions like: *What would happen if.....?* and *How would that effect you?* are good examples of questions that will prompt people to take action.

Closure Questions

Helping a buyer to take action often requires prompting. This is done by simply asking for a next action. It's really asking for permission to move ahead to the next step in the buying process. In many cases it's asking for agreement to place an order with you. Mission accomplished.

Learn more about questioning skills at a GRA sales workshop.

Call 910.617.1817
for your free Sales Training Starter Kit.

SCHEDULING

To schedule a GRA workshop, call **910.617.1817** to discuss your training objectives and requirements. Once the critical training needs are outlined, workshop content is laid out. GRA works closely with clients to match content with corporate values and culture. Workshops are conducted only after client approval of the content and presentation materials.

Workshops must be scheduled at least one month in advance.

Head Coach



LEW KURTZMAN

Lew has been coaching and training managers and sales professionals for over thirty years. He founded GRA in 1993 because he was unsatisfied with ordinary, off-the-shelf training programs.

Lew spends much of his time researching real world business situations and applies his findings to every GRA workshop. This insures that all training content is up-to-date and realistic.

The critically acclaimed book, *Selling Outside Your Culture Zone*, has been developed into a new GRA workshop. Call today for details.

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