

**CHAPTER**

**1**

Boring or Engaging:  
How Do Your  
Questions Measure Up?





YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE a number of questions you ask your clients during a sales call. Typical questions include:

- What do you know about our company?
- How can we help you?
- Whom are you currently using?
- How long have you been with your current vendor?
- What do you like about your current vendor?
- What do you dislike about your current vendor?
- What's your average volume?
- What are your goals?
- What are you paying now?
- What if I could give you the same/better/similar solution for a cheaper price? Would you be interested?
- Do you have a budget?
- When are you looking to make a change?
- Are you the decision maker?
- Can I put together a proposal for you?

You may feel good about a meeting during which you've asked these questions because you've garnered some useful information about current product usage, specifications, and the likes and dislikes of the prospective customer. But to the customer, the questions you asked were virtually identical to those asked by every other salesperson; there's nothing about your call that differentiated you from the other salespeople the client is considering using.

You benefited from this interaction because you gathered information you did not know before you made the call. The prospective client, however, did not gain anything from this meeting. Most of the call was spent going over information he already knew. So to the client, your questions are boring. They will likely lead to his saying something like: "Why don't you leave me some product literature so I can take time to digest the information and then get back to you?"

## **Salespeople as Problem Solvers**

All salespeople present themselves as problem solvers, yet most never ask clients to vividly describe the problems they are experiencing. Rarely do they ask how the clients themselves are affected by those problems. Without asking these kinds of questions, salespeople do not offer their clients the opportunity to open up and vent their frustrations. Instead of falling into this trap, learn to truly engage your customer.

In truth, any salesperson can gather facts. But the outstanding salesperson ignites the emotions of prospective customers and uncovers what motivates them to act. Unfortunately, most salespeople do not know how to spur people on to action. Either they are afraid to get to the real emotions or they are unclear about what to do once those emotions come to the surface. Although your usual list of questions might garner an adequate amount of information, the questioning techniques presented in the following chapters will ensure that you gain access to *all* of the facts you need in order to make a sale.

Asking engaging questions will not guarantee a positive outcome. Some prospective customers will not yet be ready to admit they need help, and other times a company will not have a genuine need for your service or product. Engaging questions, however, will allow you as a salesperson to see these issues early on and to determine the right course of action for each prospective client.

**Exercise 1**

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Take a moment to write down all of the questions you typically ask during an initial sales call to a prospective customer. Try to come up with as many questions as possible.

**Exercise 2**

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Contact a prospective client and ask some of the questions on your list. Keep track of which questions you ask as well as how much time you spend talking during the call. If you have a tape recorder, consider taping the conversation; this will help you avoid being tempted to overestimate how well you did during the call. Immediately after the call ends, answer the following questions:

1. Which questions did you ask?
2. Approximately how long was the conversation?
3. How much time did you spend talking?
4. Did you find yourself talking more than you meant to?
5. Did your questions serve primarily your needs or the needs of your prospective customer?
6. After this call, do you have a sense of the problems your prospective client is currently facing? If so, what exactly are those problems?
7. Are you aware of the future goals of this prospective client? If so, what is his vision for the future?
8. Do you think you set yourself apart from other salespeople during this conversation? If so, state specifically how you think your questions set you apart from other salespeople in your field.
9. Are you any closer to completing the sale than you were before the call?
10. Do you have a commitment from the prospective client to pursue the next step in the sale? If so, what is it?
11. What do you think the prospective client's impression of you was after the first call?

Now that you have examined your questions, consider honestly how well you think you did. Most likely you found several areas that you need to

work on to improve your questioning techniques. Once you have accepted that your questions might need some tweaking, you will need to better understand your audience. Getting into the psyche of your prospective clients will allow you to ask better questions and get higher-quality information. To do this, you need to know where the clients are coming from and what pushes their buttons.

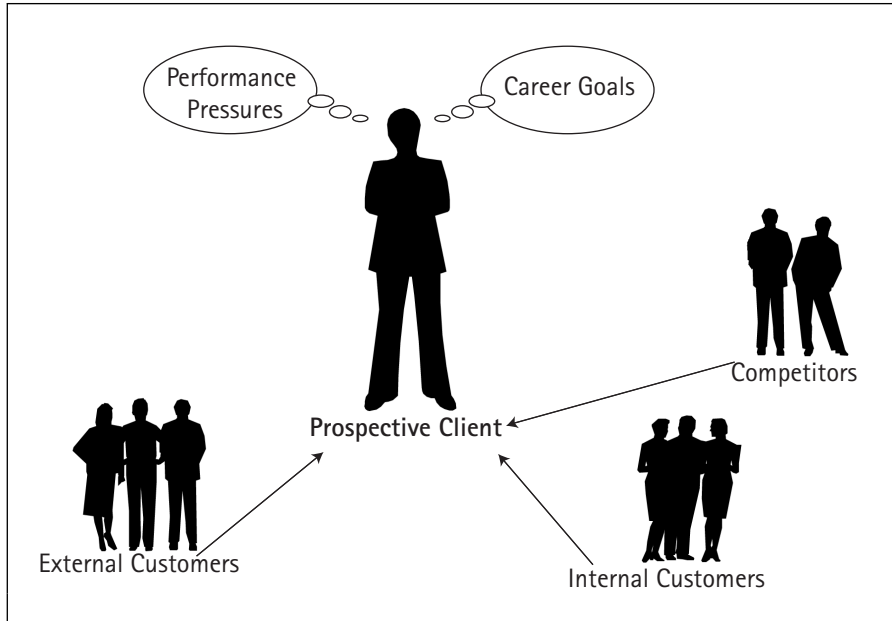
## **Influences on Customer Behavior**

As a sales professional you understand that decisions are rarely, if ever, made by one person. Companies have safeguards and inhibitors to ensure that determinations are not made until all possible factors are considered. While this may be good for companies, it makes your job more difficult. Your prospective customer must report to numerous people, such as bosses, other departments within the company, colleagues on the team, stockholders, and board members, as well as customers who are dependent on the company to deliver a product.

Just like you, your prospective customers are motivated to improve their standard of living, to upgrade their position in the company, and to achieve the recognition they deserve. You will have success building a relationship with your potential customers only when you can get into their world and identify the forces at work in their lives. Figure 1-1 illustrates the different factors prospective customers must deal with when making a decision about whether or not to do business with you.

Who are all of these people shown in Figure 1-1? The category of “internal customers” includes bosses, board members, colleagues, and coworkers in other divisions. Internal customers set limits for how much money your prospective client can spend and may even erect obstacles to block the completion of a sale. Internal customers have their own agendas—agendas that you need to learn about as soon as possible in the course of the sale. Many times these agendas conflict with each other and lead to disputes among workers in the same company. If you can uncover the motivations and concerns of your prospective client’s internal customers, you will be able to diffuse the situation and move on with the sale. “External customers” include those who do business with your prospective client. These are the people whom your client wants to satisfy, and therefore you should try to gain as much information about external customers as you can in order to better understand what drives your prospective customer. A prospective

FIGURE 1-1. Factors affecting the customer’s decision to buy.



customer who has managerial or senior-level responsibilities will definitely be more eager to learn how your solutions could help in dealings with external customers.

The people you call on are also concerned with the actions of their competitors. Depending on the position of your prospective customers, excelling beyond the level of competitors will be anywhere from a minor concern to their top priority. For example, if you are at a meeting with the president of a company, obviously being competitive is an extremely important item on her list; she will certainly want to differentiate her company from the competition. When discussing software with the head of information technology, however, the actions of his competitors may not even cross his mind. Either way, it is important for you as a salesperson to discover to what degree internal customers, external customers, and competitors influence the decisions of your prospective clients.

Another factor influencing a prospective client’s actions is “career goals” and other personal motivations. There’s the supervisor who wants to become a vice president, and the president who wants to take his national company to international levels—all of your prospective clients have visions

and dreams for themselves. By carefully unlocking those desires, you can present yourself as a “solution provider”—someone who can assist them in achieving their goals.

One final influence on prospective customers is the “performance pressures” they feel on the job every day. These include issues of profits, losses, and costs of production and they can dictate the day-to-day lives of many working people. A salesperson who identifies these pressures can appeal to the needs of prospective customers to meet their budgets, generate more revenues, and reduce costs.

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The tools presented in this book will enable you to put together engaging questions. From now on you will be asking your prospective customers fewer questions and getting more information of a higher quality. These techniques will help you set yourself apart from the other salespeople in your field. Once you have finished reading this book, you will have acquired all the skills you need to craft a new set of questions, tailored to your industry and guaranteed to earn the rapport and respect of many more customers.