

How Questions Can Help You Reach Peak Performance

Asking questions is the best way to get to know your customers and to understand their unique needs. Here are a few benefits of asking questions:

A. Asking questions demonstrates a genuine interest in and concern for customers

1. Questions are a signal to the customer that you're interested in their situation and in finding solutions for their problems.
2. Asking questions builds personal involvement with your customer by generating dialogue.

B. Questions make customers feel more at home.

1. Questions increase dialogue and, therefore, help customers feel at ease.
2. Asking questions with sincerity relieves the customer's tension and builds trust.

C. Asking questions helps you qualify customers.

You can better determine a customer's economic standing and present only those products he/she will find usable.

D. By asking questions, you learn vital information that can help you serve customers better.

You can better determine an individual customer's situation and application needs, which will help you make the best product recommendation.

E. Asking questions positions you as a consultant, rather than as a salesperson or service representative.

Customers won't feel like victims of a "hard-sell" effort if you ask questions. Instead they will correctly feel that they are consulting with a bearing expert who is looking out for their best interests.

F. Questions enable you to maintain control of the selling situation.

You subtly lead the customer where you want to go with skillfully phrased questions.

G. Questions can help customers make important discoveries about their needs.

By asking questions, you might acquaint a customer with a need he/she has never considered.

H. Questions get customers involved in the selling process.

As clients answer your questions, they help generate a dialogue in which they play an important part. As they share information, they become involved in the selling process.

I. Questions help to reveal potential objections.

The way a customer phrases or delivers an answer might provide insight into his/her personal likes and dislikes.

How To Ask Questions Effectively

Here are 15 techniques you can use to become a master at asking questions.

A. Learn how to always use the right type of question.

There are several types of questions you can use to get information and cooperation from customers:

1. **Open questions.** These are questions which cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” When asked open questions, customers must elaborate. These questions often begin with the words:
 - a. What
 - b. How
 - c. Why
2. **Closed questions.** These questions obtain facts and can be used to direct the conversation to a specific area. For example:

“Are you satisfied with the supplier you’re currently using?”
3. **Clarifying questions.** These questions are usually paraphrases of a customer’s remarks. These questions help you clarify generalizations. For example:
 - a. “To be sure I understand you correctly, you’re saying you would like a blanket order over the next twelve months?”
 - b. “In other words, you want an instant shipment of the partial order?”

4. ***Trial Questions.*** These questions help you determine how close a customer is to making a decision. They are usually direct and to the point. For example:
 - a. “Would you be interested in a blanket order for a specific period, or would you prefer specifying it one month at a time?”
 - b. “Would you like this blanket order to run for six or twelve months?”

B. Always be prepared to ask the right questions.

Know About:

1. Your products
2. Your industry.
3. Your customer’s specific situation.

C. Customize your questions for each individual.

1. Don’t rely upon a list of standard or “canned” questions.
2. Develop a line of questioning that reflects your knowledge of the customer’s individual situation.

D. Ask permission to ask questions.

1. Don’t interrogate the customer. A request - “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?” - puts the customer at ease and positions you better than simply launching into a series of questions without notice.
2. Make sure the customer knows your questions are designed to obtain information to better serve him/her.

E. Start with broad, open questions, and gradually move towards more specific inquiries.

1. Ask questions first to obtain a general knowledge of the customer’s
2. Conclude the interview by pinning down specific facts, such as the specific amount and desired terms.

F. Build on previous questions.

As you receive answers to your questions, delve deeper by asking questions based on the new information.

G. Ask questions that will target the customer's needs.

H. Keep questions simple and focused.

I. Ask questions that can be answered affirmatively.

1. Studies have shown that people would rather answer "yes" than "no."
2. This technique also sets up a series of positive responses and leads customers to make positive buying decisions.

J. Use questions to clarify statements or reinforce positive feelings.

K. Give the customer time to answer your questions.

1. Listen attentively to the responses.
2. Take notes, if appropriate.

L. Avoid asking offensive questions.

1. Skirt sensitive areas; if you can't avoid them, tread gently.
2. Watch your wording and your tone of voice so you don't offend customers with seemingly abrasive or rude questions.

M. As you uncover your customer's needs, empathize with him/her.

Try to understand his/her concerns from his/her point of view.

N. Maintain a confident, helpful attitude as you ask questions.

O. Be polite.

A customer will answer questions much more readily if the person asking them is sensitive to his/her concerns.

Ten Questions That Reveal Feelings

How do you feel about...?

What do you think...?

Do you think it would be better if...?

What would you suggest...?

Why is that important to you...?

May I ask you what you like most about...?

How important is that to you...?

What is your opinion...?

What would be your reaction to...?

Could you give me an example of that...?