

# The Problem that Many of Us Don't Know We Have.

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## Uncommon Value

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If you could name one skill that salespeople across the spectrum could get better at, what would it be? Hint: It's also one of the primary skills required of successful salespeople. It's also one of the skills that is markedly missing in many salespeople, but one that many salespeople think they are pretty good at, which I think is a big problem and I don't mean that in a bad way. It only makes sense that if your perception of your ability in a particular skill is greater than your actual skill level, you will never work to get better at it. I mean, why work on something that you don't perceive to be an issue in the first place, right? Wrong. It becomes a blind spot and hinders an opportunity for self-improvement.

I'm talking about questioning skills. Although most salespeople believe they do a good job of asking questions, many sales managers and thought leaders would disagree.

The reason why asking questions is so important is because the answers to well thought out questions help the salesperson tailor their sales presentations based on what's important to the buyer. Would you rather take a shotgun approach when presenting your solutions – peppering the buyer with feature after feature of your offering hoping that two or three will stick or take a rifle approach – ask questions to determine points of interest or challenges, and tailor your presentation to what issues your offering will help the buyer solve, or opportunities in front of them to take advantage of? All salespeople will say the rifle approach is better, but too many still ask a couple of perfunctory questions, get the first hint of a weakness in a competitor's offering or a customer's situation, and then start blasting away with the shotgun hoping to hit on something. Just stop it!!

The first thing to do is go into the sales call with the proper mindset. Stephen Covey once said to build better relationships with people we should listen to understand, not respond. That is incredibly hard to do, but incredibly powerful when we can do it. That is because people have an innate desire to be understood, and when we let customers and prospects know beyond a shadow of a doubt... with our questions, our eyes, and our body language that we want to understand them, it draws them to us, and they don't even realize it. A key word is "curious." Salespeople that possess good questioning skills are often curious by nature. They are curious about people's situations, issues, motivations, etc. The old saying is "curiosity killed the cat," and that's true, but curiosity sure helps in the sales profession.

I've found that the following questions are good ones to ask when a customer or prospect is willing to share some issues with you. What problem/issue are you experiencing? How long have you been dealing with it? What's prevented you from doing something about it until now? What worries you the most about tackling this problem/issue? What's the most important thing to you in handling this situation?

Sales is all about persuasion. You must persuade people to understand that your solution is the best one for their situation. You should know what problems your products and/or services solve for the buyer and how they solve them. Then ask questions designed to bring problems you can solve to light and communicate how your offering will accomplish that in a succinct manner. Don't start solving a problem until you fully understand it. This lets people know that it's important to you... you want to help them figure out a solution to their issue, and just like a magnet, this will draw them to you.



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