



Want to Know How Your Service Is? Ask!

Better questions equal better answers and more sales

By CHRIS TOOKER

How Can I Help You?
Customer service as the final, most important pillar of Personal Branding

Have you ever lost a sale only to find out after the fact that the customer was talking to your competitor? Have you ever had a client become upset when you presented a solution that wasn't just right for their needs? You can experience both of these unpleasant situations after only a short time in business, and many times these painful and costly lessons can be traced back to one failing on your part: failing to ask the right questions. Whether you're in a customer service or sales business, questions help to reveal the client's needs...and what they expect of you, rational or otherwise. Ever heard the saying: "A closed mouth doesn't get fed?" In business, an unasked question can cost you a sale or a client.

The Right Questions to Ask

There are five basic steps to the sales process:

- 1) Prospecting
- 2) Appointment Setting
- 3) Qualifying
- 4) Presentations
- 5) Closing

All the top producers in sales and the top-level professionals in customer service understand that qualifying makes you money and builds your service reputation. You've got to find out if this is the right customer for you. If he's looking for something you can provide, if she has expectations that you can fulfill, and so on. Take the time to qualify your prospects with questions-and don't be afraid to turn away the ones who give the wrong answers-and you'll end up with customers who make it possible for you to provide the best customer service.

Start by asking critical "Who, What and Why" questions:

- ◆ *What was your last experience with someone like me?*
- ◆ *Why did you end that relationship?*
- ◆ *What factors will help you make your decisions?*
- ◆ *How does my proposal meet your expectations?*

- ◆ *What areas does my proposal not address?*
- ◆ *When you find what you're looking for, when will you be ready to start?*
- ◆ *What's been the biggest obstacle to you getting what you want?*
- ◆ *What else can I help you with?*

Find Out How They're Feeling

When you're dealing with customers who seem unhappy about the service they've received, the process is the same. Getting past complaints to their emotions helps you become their advisor. Another way to do this is to go past the basic questions to find out what they're really looking for: someone to listen, someone they can trust, efficiency, security and so on. Get to the emotional heart of why someone is unhappy and you'll open up many new ways to make them happy. Try questions like:

- ◆ *Is there something you haven't told me that I need to know?*
- ◆ *It sounds like there's a story behind all this; would you like to share it with me?*
- ◆ *It seems like this has affected you very deeply. Can you tell me why?*
- ◆ *How can I make things better?*

Once you have confirmed the issues, problems, and emotions involved in your client's dissatisfaction, you can lead them to the things they need, which might be different from what they thought they needed originally! When you have asked all the questions, attached value or consequences to unresolved issues, and presented people with solutions, you become valued as a true advisor, not just a service provider.

Bottom line: when you ask better questions, the customer is happier and you build a reputation.

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