Accelerate

Questions To Ask & Finding the Problem

In my blog post titled 'How to Handle 10+ Sales Meetings a Week', I discuss how a solid social selling method can lead you to book over 10 extra sales meetings each week per person.

But, with so many meetings, you've got to be adept at asking the right questions. These should be questions that help you figure out if a customer (or potential customer) is facing a problem that your service or product can solve.

Even when the customer doesn't think they have a problem, it's important for you to identify it. And you've got to do this quickly, without making it sound like a sales pitch. I've covered the reasons for this in the blog.

To make things easier, I've put together this supplementary document. This guide is brimming with sample questions and tips on how to structure your meeting to unearth the real issue and set up a follow-up meeting. It's all yours to use and benefit from!

I'll be using a fictional company and a hypothetical use case as examples. However, the four tips I've included will give you the framework you need to apply these strategies to your own sales meetings. Enjoy!

Tip 1: Understanding Their Organisation

So, the questions you're going to ask here might seem a bit vague at first. But trust me, they're key to understanding your customer's world better. Remember, your goal is to figure out if they have the problem that your solution addresses.

These questions should help you gather some concrete details about the customer's organisation. Ahead of the meeting, you might be able to dig up some of these 'facts' - maybe by doing a deep dive into their website, skimming through their social posts, or even poring over a couple of reports. Basically, any resource that can give you facts related to the problem your product or service solves is worth looking into. Once you've gathered this info, you can use your meeting to confirm these details.

For instance, let's say your product is designed to enhance internal communication within a medium to large Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Its aim is to link teachers and school leaders together to share best practices and boost academic progress for their pupils.

Let's get creative and call this business: "TrustTalks". Nice!

To understand your customer's needs, you'd need to know how many schools are in the MAT, and where these schools are located geographically. You'd want to know how many primary schools there are, how many are secondary schools, and if they have any schools for special educational needs.

You can usually find this info on their website. But it's always good to doublecheck. So you might ask:

- "I was browsing through your website and saw that you have 15 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. Is that accurate? I know keeping websites updated can be quite the task."
- After they respond, you could follow up with: "Wow, that's quite a lot of people! How many people work across these schools and the Trust's central team?"
- You might also ask: "So, are all your schools based in and around Birmingham?"
- And, "Do you have any plans to expand the number of academies in the MAT?"

From here, you'd have a pretty good idea about the number of schools, their types, the number of employees, their geographical spread, and their growth

plans. With this knowledge, you can start to dig deeper into potential communication issues within the organisation.

Now, I've never personally worked with an internal comms product before, so these questions might not be perfect.

But the key takeaway here is that you **need to gather facts that relate to the problem your solution addresses.**

Tip 2: Find the Problem

Alright, let's continue with our TrustTalks example. Now, you're going to ask some questions to understand how poor communication between schools might be affecting the culture, staff, and students.

By this stage, you should've done your homework on the MAT. Let's assume one of their primary schools is doing exceptionally well in Reading, according to their Ofsted report and national attainment data. But you've noticed that Reading scores have started to drop in three of their other schools.

You could start by asking:

- "I noticed that Reading scores seem to be falling in schools X, Y, and Z. Any idea why that might be happening?"
- "What strategies are currently being implemented to address this?"
- "Do you think this issue could be cropping up in other schools as well?"
- "Could this be happening in other subjects too?"
- "How has this situation affected staff morale?"

These questions are tailored specifically for our imaginary company, TrustTalks, and a very specific problem - boosting Reading development in students by facilitating the sharing of effective teaching practices.

Now, this scenario assumes that the responses will point toward a problem that TrustTalks can solve. But that won't always be the case. If TrustTalks can solve other issues and you discover that this Reading problem isn't a high priority for the MAT, then you may need to shift your focus and ask different questions to uncover other potential problems.

Remember, identifying the problem is often the trickiest part of the conversation.

Becoming a pro at problem-finding takes practice. But with all the meetings you'll be setting up, you'll get plenty of opportunities to hone this skill. So, no need to sweat it!

Tip 3: Check Their Emotions

As you're asking these problem-finding questions, pay close attention to how they react when they answer, especially when you hit on a real problem. This is super important. Do they seem...

- Worried?
- Sad?
- Scared?
- Excited?

Noticing this and making a mental note can really help in your future meetings. How so? Because you can tailor your conversation to their emotional state. For instance, if they're scared, you could reassure them about how your product can solve the problem that's been causing them sleepless nights.

If they're excited, you can channel that energy by discussing how fantastic it will be once they connect teachers, share best practices and start seeing increased levels of reading development in those schools.

On the other hand, if they seem indifferent, then you've likely identified a problem the organisation has, but it might not directly affect them. In this case, you'll need to dig a bit deeper to find out who it does impact and ask for an introduction.

Shaping your future conversations around their feelings towards the problem can help you build a strong rapport and demonstrate that you understand their organisation (tip 1), their challenges (tip 2), and them as individuals (tip 3). Notice where we've ended up here? You're not talking about yourself, your business, or your product! Instead, you're focusing on - and gaining a deep understanding of - **them**, **their** organisation, and **their** challenges.

Tip 4: Ending the Meeting

Alright, so here comes the easy part. There are two possible outcomes: either you set up another meeting or you don't. Let's break it down.

You've learned a ton about your customer, you understand their problems, and you know you can help them. So, what's next? You might say something like:

- "I think I can help you, [name]. I'm not here to pitch anything right now, but I genuinely think I can help with [problem found]. Does it make sense for us to book another session so we can unpack that a bit more?"

This question does quite a bit of heavy lifting.

Remember, your goal in this meeting isn't to make a sale. You've done an excellent job discovering their needs and identifying how your solution aligns with their problem. But resist the urge to sell. Don't undo all the good work you've done in this meeting with a sales pitch.

This question reassures them that you're not here to sell - which puts them at ease. It shows them that you've really listened and that your aim is to help, not sell.

By asking "Does it make sense", you're giving them the option to say "yes" or "no".

If they say "no", that's okay. They might not believe you can help them. Even if you're confident you can, keep the lines of communication open. Regularly sharing content that addresses the problem you solve can keep you top-of-mind. When they realise they do have a problem you can solve, they'll likely reach out.

Please note: if they've said "no" to the closing question, don't push for another meeting or a sale. It's not a good use of your time and it could damage the rapport you've built.

If they say "yes", go ahead and schedule that follow-up meeting right then and there. So, in that next meeting, they will be expecting a sales meeting. So, using a robust social selling method to get you 10+ meetings per week, per person now turns into more meetings that are qualified leads!

Find Out More

To read the rest of the blog, you can go here: How To Handle 10+ Sales Meetings a Week

If you have any questions, please feel free to message me at:

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