

Socratic Selling: how to ask the questions that get the sale

Socratic Method: A method of teaching or discussion, as used by Socrates, in which one asks a series of easily answered questions that inevitably lead the answerer to a logical conclusion.

- Respect the customer
- Help the customer think
- Help the customer make decisions.

End of chapter notes

Begin with a Socratic opener:

Say you are prepared

"Mr Jones, I'm prepared to talk about, which we discussed on the phone."

Invite the customer to speak on the subject.

"If you could give me your perspective on that . . ."

Offer an immediate benefit.

"We can focus the meeting on what interests you."

Every customer has a perspective on a subject and is only too happy to share it. Ask.

The customer owns the past.

The customer has no stake in the future – until the past has been dealt with.

Help the customer tell the story.

Use Socratic draw probes:

"Tell me more about . . ."

"Would you elaborate on"

"Give me an example of"

"What else should I know about"

"What else would help me understand"

Use Socratic access probes:

"How does fit the picture?"

"Talk to me about your experience with"

"How do you handle ?"

Believe that the sale is being made when the customer speaks about the need. Not one moment is wasted.
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The clock runs faster on the customer.

Ask easily answered questions about urgency.

“Why now?”

“What makes this urgent?”

“Why is this important right now?”

Take advantage of the highly visible deadlines.

Seasonal deadlines

Phase completion deadlines

Watch for less visible deadlines

Start-up deadlines

New Broom deadlines

Unspent budget deadlines

The customer's second need is a solution. The customer's first need is to get started on a solution.

Facts about the need determine the choice of product or service.

The customer's feelings determine the buying decision.

Ask easily answered questions about feelings.

For irritants:

“What bothers you most about this?”

“I sense you're frustrated by this . . .”

“How tough a position does this put you in?”

For motivators:

“How does this affect you?”

“I sense this means a lot to you.”

“Why is this important to you?”

Sales are closed through what the customer feels.

The sharpest competitive edge is the one your competition neglect.

The customer needs to know you understand.

Listening fosters lasting relationships.

Listening fosters unbeatable relationships.

You haven't listened until you can show you have listened.

Play back a summary of the facts.

If you don't get it right, the customer is happy to help you try again.

A playback draws fresh information

Play back the person.

Ask yourself, what is important to the customer?

If the customer has feelings about it, the person is involved.

Ask easily answered questions:

“How does that sound?”

“Do I have it right?”

“Am I getting the picture?”

“Is that it?”

When you play back what is important to the customer, you capture the person of the customer.

Ask easily answered questions to elicit decisions:

Lead in

Specific decision

“If you were to go ahead with . . .

when would you . . . ?”

how many would you . . . ?”

where would you . . . ?”

what kind would you . . . ?”

and so on.

To reduce pressure, build fantasy components into the question.

Use conditional words (If, were to, would)

Exclude *I* or *we*.

Exclude your brand name and your company name.

Support the customer’s conditional decisions.

Use brief playbacks

Make comments that show acceptance.

Events paint the picture of the past; decisions, the picture of the future.
Responsibility begins in seeing the future.

Make a “no surprises” proposal. Gather momentum with a summary:

“Let me summarise what I heard you say . . . “

Facts that describe needs of opportunities.

Feelings connected to:

Time urgency

Irritants

Pressure motivators

Success motivators

Conditional decisions made by the customer.

Get approval with an easily answered question:

“How does that sound?”

Make a recommendation. “I would like to make a recommendations based on what you’ve told me.”

Tie the recommendation to benefits.

Choose evidence that fits the customer.

Ask for agreement with an easily answered question:

"What's your reaction?"

Proposals that fit are ready for agreement.

The customer's question may introduce a topic of interest. Draw out the customer's interest before attempting to answer in detail.

Give a brief, general answer to the question.

Use an easily answered question to draw out more detail:

"Why do you ask?"

"What are you interested in discussing?"

"Tell me more about . . ."

Never miss a topic the customer wants to introduce.
Never miss a chance to help the customer think.

You don't understand the objection you hear. To handle it Socratically, go behind the objection.

Make the objection specific.

Probe for the concern behind the objection.

Play back the objection in a word or two.

Ask easily answered question.

"Please tell me exactly what you mean."

"Why do you ask that?"

"How did you arrive at that?"

When you don't know what the customer is talking about, you don't know what you're talking about.

Know your value to the customer.

You are a reliable resource.

The customer has invested time in you.

You offer a valuable product or service.

Know all the objections before negotiating.

Don't give away what you can trade for.

Don't get stuck with what you can't give.

Ask an easily answered "suppose question":

"Suppose we were able to resolve this issue. I know it's not resolved right now, but just suppose we could. Are there any other issues standing in the way of our doing business?"

Never underestimate the impression you make upon the customer in a Socratic dialogue.

The customer wants changes. Start by expanding the options.

Make a get list
Make a give list.

Decline and explain.

Decline the changes that take you beyond your stopping point. Explain your rationale for stopping: *"Let me explain why that's further than I can go."*

Ask an easily answered question to introduce a counter offer:

"Would you like to discuss what I think might work?"

Make a get-give counter offer:

"If you (do this), then I will (do that)."

Don't negotiate just to get the sale. Negotiate to upgrade the sale for yourself and the customer.

Help the customer make the buying decision.

Regain the momentum by summarising.

Make a diary statement.

"In order to do this for you, let's get out our diaries and schedule the next steps."

Specify the next steps.

Actions the customer offers to take.
Actions the customer wants you to take.
Actions you offer to take.
Actions you want the customer to take.

Attach dates to all action steps.

Time is the recorder of responsibility. Close on a point in time.

How To Get More Work Done In A Day

How do you achieve employment security in a world where there is no employment security? I start with a question: Do you consider yourself to be honest and at least reasonably intelligent? Okay. As an honest, intelligent person, do you, as a general rule, get about twice as much work done on the day before you go on vacation as you normally get done? Now I am going to ask you a long question, so stay with me all the way through. If we can figure out why and learn how and repeat it every day without working any longer or any harder, does it make sense that we will be more valuable to ourselves, our company, our family and our community? The answer is "Yes."

I want to make it crystal clear that I am communicating with you about you-I'm not referring to anybody else, but to you about you. You have undoubtedly already confessed that you are honest and intelligent.

Now on the night before the day before vacation, do you get your laptop or a sheet of paper out and plan, "Now tomorrow I've got to do this and this. . . ." We've coined a very clever name for that--we call that goal setting. So, you set your goals. Then you get them organized in the order of their importance.

Let me encourage you to make one slight change there. Get the disagreeable and difficult things out of the way first. Free your mind so you can concentrate on what else you have got to do. You get it organized. You accept responsibility. You make the commitments. You know that some people are about as committed as a Kamikaze pilot on his thirty-ninth mission--they just aren't serious about it.

Now commitment is important whether it is to get your education, make one more call, keep the marriage together or whatever. Commitment is important because when you hit the wall--not IF, but WHEN you hit the wall--if you have made a commitment your first thought is, "How do I solve the problem?" If you haven't made the commitment your first thought is, "How do I get out of this deal?" And we find literally what we are looking for. When you make that

commitment, things happen. It shows that you really care about the other people on the job. It demonstrates that you are dependable. Even though you're leaving town, you're not going to leave an unfinished task for others to do. Your integrity comes through.

Have you ever participated in organized team sports? Did you ever go home one night and say to your parents something like, "Mom, Dad, you won't believe the game plan the coach has worked out. Man alive, it is incredible. We're going to kill those suckers tomorrow. You can count on it." You were optimistic simply because you had a plan of action, and likewise you are optimistic that tomorrow you are going to be able to get all of the things done that need to be done before you can go on that vacation.

Now some of us are born optimistic, and some are born pessimistic. For your information, the 1828 Noah Webster Dictionary does not have the word pessimist in it. It has the word optimist. Now I am a natural born optimist. I really am. I would take my last two dollars and buy a money belt with it. That's the way I'm put together. But the good news is if you are a natural born pessimist, you definitely, emphatically, positively can change. You are a pessimist by choice because you are what you are and where you are because of what's gone into your mind. You can change what you are; you can change where you are, by changing what goes into your mind.

Anyway, on the day before you go on vacation you not only get to work on time, you are a little early and you immediately get started. You don't stand around and say, "Well, I wonder what I ought to do now." You can't wait to get after it. You want to do the right thing so you get started in a big hurry. You are enthusiastic about it. You are highly motivated. You decisively move from one task to another.

Now I am going to camp on this one for just a moment. Have you noticed that as a general rule people who have nothing to do want to do it with you? It's true, isn't it? Now, on this day before vacation, when you finish one task you move with purpose to another one. And people just will not block you for that two-minute gossip session or four-minute or five-minute or six-minute chat. I am absolutely convinced and have no doubt about it that the listener has more to do with gossiping than the speaker does, because if you

don't listen nobody is going to gossip to you. They just won't.

When you move with purpose, people will step aside and let you go. I will absolutely guarantee that you will save a minimum of an hour a day in two-, three, five-minute spurts of time. An hour a day is five hours per week is 250 hours per year. That is six weeks of your life that you've wasted and six weeks of combined time that you have wasted with people who have been gossiping with you. What could you do with six extra weeks every year?

Focus on the issue at hand. Discipline yourself to stay with it until you finish. Cybil Stanton gave me the best definition of discipline I have ever read in her book, The Twenty Five Hour Woman. "Discipline isn't on your back needling you with imperatives. It is at your side encouraging you with incentives."

Treat every day like it's the day before vacation and you will get more work done!