

Feeble Questions Can Kill Your Business

“Would you like to know the difference between these products?”

“Can I explain what makes us different than our competitors?”

“Is saving money important to you?”

“Do you want this feature?”

Do you ask these questions or variations of them?

I certainly hope not. They are feeble questions and they do nothing to help you stand out from the crowd or give people a reason to buy from you. Yet, many of the salespeople I encounter still have a tendency to ask these types of questions.

Let’s face it. Selling today is a heck of a lot more challenging than it used to be. Virtually every business I know faces more competition than ever before. That’s why it is so critical you ask high-quality, thought-provoking questions instead of feeble ones.

I recently worked with a company to help their sales team become more proficient with the sale process. To accomplish this, we invested the better of a day discussing the best questions to ask, how to ask them, and what to do with the information gained from these questions. Initially, the team felt that they were adept at this aspect of the sale process because they were usually able to uncover each person’s needs. However, their questions were primarily fact-finding and closed-ended in nature and they did little to gain insight into each customer’s real buying motives.

As we progressed through the day, the reps began to see the difference between great questions and feeble ones. However, an even more interesting observation came to light.

While everyone knew—at least intellectually—what questions they needed to ask, the actual execution and application was much more difficult. Most of the group struggled to find the appropriate question and found it challenging to incorporate these questions into their routine. However, after several practice sessions, some of the reps started to become more comfortable asking more high-quality questions.

Feeble questions kill your business for a variety of reasons:

1. You don’t get the opportunity to move the sales process forward. Feeble questions do nothing to help you determine buying motives which means you will have more difficulty moving the sales process in the right direction.
2. You don’t present yourself as a sales professional. Average sales people ask average (aka feeble) questions. If you want to be perceived as a professional, you need to change your questions.
3. You don’t distinguish yourself from everyone else selling a similar product or service. Feeble questions don’t give you the information you need to adapt your sales presentation so that it reflects the issues and concerns faced by your prospect.

4. You don’t give people a reason to buy from you. Feeble questions don’t motivate people to make a buying decision. Even questions like, “If I could do that price, would you take it?” are seldom effective in getting people to buy from you versus a competitor.

Most sales people are desperate to talk about their product or service or to present a solution. And, in many cases, they end up talking too much, too soon. I will never dispute that it is difficult to NOT discuss a solution because we feel that if we aren’t talking we aren’t selling. Yet, the most successful people in sales understand this approach costs them money. They know that presenting a solution too early will not address all of the key decision-making criteria and that only by asking a few more high-quality questions will they fully uncover the buying motives of each prospect or customer.

When I ask people in my sales training workshops why they don’t ask more questions I usually hear these answers:

“It takes too long.”

“What if people don’t give me the answer I want?”

“I don’t know what to do with the information.”

“I just want to pitch my product/service.”

I grimace when I hear these responses because I know that these individuals are losing sales and they probably don’t even realize it. A small investment of time early in the sales process will pay great dividends later on. Here is an example of some high-quality questions:

“What goals are you striving to achieve this quarter/year?”

“We have noticed these trends occurring in the industry...How are they affecting your business?”

“What some of the biggest challenges you’re faced with right now?”

“How does this project compare in priority against the other ones you have on your plate?”

Stand out from your competition by asking great questions. Questions that require your prospect or customer to think. Questions that the average sales person won’t ask. Questions that demonstrate your expertise. Questions that will help better present your solution, product or service. Questions that are not feeble!

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