21 Powerful Questions to Gain INSTANT Control of the Sales Call and Close More Deals

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I am a Growth Catalyst for B2B Startups and the Founder of Sales On Brakes. Over the past years, I have helped B2B SaaS startups with Fortune 1000 customers generate more leads, nurture more sales opportunities and close more deals. My work with clients result in >5x increase in sales pipeline $ value.

Feel free to email me, connect with me on Twitter and LinkedIn or schedule a chat.

Welcome

Hey there!

There may be at least one of three reasons why you're reading this brief report.

You want to ask powerful questions
You want to gain control of the sales call
You want close more deals

If any of these are true, then Yes! You're at the right place!

I'll have to say upfront though: these questions are not miracle pills. They are not manipulative wands. Neither are they your dream shortcuts to sales (newsflash: there are none).

But by using them thoughtfully and intelligently during your sales calls, as I have, you will become consistent in advancing and closing sales calls.

In this short report, I will share with you some of the questions I've personally used and learned from other top sales leaders to help close more deals. Whiles I've written this report specifically for SaaS B2B sales, I some of the questions can work in other sales contexts too.

Let's start with the Why!

Why Ask Powerful Questions If You Want to Gain Control?

"As a rule, the person who asks questions has control. The individual who is answering the questions is controlled by the person who is asking them. Whenever you ask a question and listen attentively to the answer, you are controlling the directional flow of the sales conversation, which is as it should be."

Brian Tracy, Author The Psychology of Selling

Ever heard the saying that telling is not selling? That's right. One way you know you're losing control over the sales call is when the customer is doing all the listening. Or alternatively, when you're doing all the talking.

Unfortunately, there is still that erroneous perception that a good salesperson is the one who can talk the most.

The fastest way to close more sales deals is to master the sales conversation.

The fastest way to master the sales conversation is by asking lots of quality questions. In my experience, no customer has ever said to me, "you ask too many questions".

But you just don't want to be asking questions for the sheer sake of it. In fact, if done unintelligently, questions can backfire and lead potential customers to lose interest in the product you have.

Asking questions helps us to delve deeper into the underlying emotions and motivations of the customer. And decipher a clever and meaningful way to align our sales propositions. As it turns out, customers buy for different reasons; and it our duty as a salespeople to identify these reasons and align our proposition accordingly.

Think of it this way: when you ask a question, you encourage the prospect to engage. To respond to your question. The person responding is following the lead of the person asking.

So whenever you feel you're losing track of the sales call, pause and ask a powerful question. It sounds counterintuitive. You may assume that you take instant control of a sales call by talking all the the time. No.

I've never met anyone who has closed a deal without asking a question. In B2B sales, asking the right questions is the key to making the sale.

In this report, I have grouped the questions to reflect the different circumstances under which they can be used a lot more effectively. Of course, you can modify the questions and use them under other totally unrelated circumstances as well.

Here are the five groups

Qualification

In B2B sales, this is the most important step in the process. Qualification helps you to determine whether or not the prospect is the right fit for your product. And vice versa. By asking the right questions here, you pave way for a healthy pipeline.

Demos

Demos are a great chance to show what matters most to the customer. Demos are not about your coolest features. Often, sales reps make the mistake of making demos a feature trip; overloading customer with features that they don't need. The best way to align a demo to real needs of a potential customer is to spend at least 5 minutes asking quality questions.

Time

Your pipeline doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's relevance and effectiveness is cast within a specific time scope. You need to ask quality questions to get a good sense of whether the timeline you've projected for the sale aligns with the buyers internal buying process and timeline.

Money

This is one of my favorites because ultimately you want to close the deal. You can surely ask your way to get a commitment, not push. Remember everybody loves buying, but hate being sold to. The best sales reps know how to ask logical questions that lead to getting a financial commitment.

Breakup

No matter how positive you are as a salesperson, sometimes you'd have to let a high potential lead go.

Many salespeople use breakups literally – as a goodbye. Rather than being inspired by good-byes, breakup messages should be crafted with the intention to re-warm a warm lead that has gone cold. As you will find out, these final set of questions are ones you ask yourself, not the prospect.

Powerful Questions for Different Purposes

These questions are not in any particular order. Feel free to use them as and when they make sense in your sales call and pipeline. You'll later on find that you could use more than one in any particular call.

The point is not to memorise word for word (of course you can do that if you want). But the best way to get the best out of these questions is to reflect on them, understand their intents and apply them as and when the context is right during your sales calls.

Qualification Facilitator

1) Have you ever used a [mention similar service] in the past? How challenging was is to get the results you wanted?

This is a better alternative to the question "Tell me about your challenges" or "What is keeping you awake at night". This question delves directly into two things.

One, it gives you an idea of the buyer's learning curve in terms of the solution you're offering. Two, it ultimately reveals the results the buyer is looking for. You'll know whether your software has the capacity to deliver the results they are looking for.

The answer from this call could be a time saver. Because you might realize the customer is not a good fit for you. Or vice versa.

2) How committed are you to getting the results you described?

This is a follow up to the previous question. Some prospects may just be shopping around. Asking this open ended question let's you get a feel of the whether the prospect has a financial motive of purchasing.

Your goal as a sales rep is to spend more time with the prospects most qualified to buy within a certain time scope.

So early on in the sales call, make sure you ask this question to align your pipeline with the expectations.

3) Who has the power to stop this deal from moving forward?

What you're seeking to achieve with this question is to identify the ultimate stakeholder. Sometimes, the people who initially sign up for your product are interns or lower level executives without any decision making power.

By knowing early on in the call who else has the decision making authority, you will be able to finetune your sales conversation to address the concerns of the different stakeholders involved. If you're using the Account Based Selling approach, this can help you tailor messages very well.

4) How many people rely on your team to get results?

Prospects are hoping to accomplish something with your product. That is a result they have in mind.

Similar to question 1, this question seeks to identify the results the prospect is hoping to achieve. From a different angle.

Also, it helps you to understand what is most important to the person you're talking to and guide the conversation around that. Note the indirect way of asking. The questions puts them in the good light as a team player, looking to help the team achieve results. Some prospects might be hesitant telling you, if you fail to add the "team" part.

Demo Crusher

5) What are the top three results you're looking to achieve with our software?
Recently, one founder told me he does a demo by listing all the features in his software. I cringed.

The fastest way to lose a deal is overburdening the demo with feature showing that you think is cool. The prospect doesn't care!

By asking this question at the beginning of the demo, you slash out all the unnecessary showings and focus only the features that aligns with the value the prospect is hoping to achieve.

Don't treat a demo as a junk yard. Always make it special and customize it to suit the prospect you're speaking with.

6) Why are those results important to your business?

This is a good to follow up to the previous question. Because when you get the prospect to talk a little more about how those results are important, you will discover different ways in which your product can help achieve that results.

You will know the chief drivers. And you will be pitching to the core of their needs. Not the shallow part.

7) What results are you held accountable for?

Everyone wants to feel good about what they do. They want to feel they are making a contribution. So why don't you tap into this emotional component of this human nature?

By asking this question, you genuinely elevate your prospect as a main contributor to the company she is working with. And that respect you show in that question, will pay off with an answer that can enable you to close the deal.

Remember that if you are able to show how this person will benefit, they will be on their way to becoming your a champion of your product.

8) If I showed you [refer to prospect's concern], will it address the major concern you have about using our software?

Sometimes in a demo, prospects are too quick to ask questions which you clearly see may not address the value they will get.

Your goal is not to show everything that the customer asks.

You're better off only showing features that will drive value for their business. And that is I've personally often used this question like an objection handler. If the prospect requests to see a feature in the 15-20 mins demo that is not particularly value driving, stop and ask this question.

Credibility Driver

9) Our customers getting the most out of the software are using it to solve [mention most important problems]. Are there additional challenges you'd like to solve?

Sometimes, the customer is unsure about whether your company has the credibility to deliver on the promises you have made in the demo presentation or at any point. Even when they believe you, they might still be looking for the one reason why they should work with you regardless.

As a startup you might not have a whole lot of big name customers. But using this question will scope things down to the few customers deriving utmost benefit from your software. You will show the potential customer that when they buy, they will not be alone. And they will be getting value like people in their industry.

10) Some of our customers failed to make the most of our software because of [mention least process-related challenge] within their team. How does that process look like for your team?

This is similar to the previous one. But the twist to this question is that you appear human and tell the prospect about what could go wrong.

This question will help you to envision how successful your relationship will be and whether there are any potential hamstrings that you should be aware of.

11) We do not offer [refer to feature asked], but over [mention total number of users you have] use [alternative feature] to solve the same challenge. How does this apply to your business?

I've often used this as an objection handler. Sometimes prospects ask for a benefit because of what they are used to. But your solution might be offering a better solution in a different way.

Instead of just mentioning the different way, point out to the users you have and how this "different" way is driving their business forward. Granted, your "different" way becomes more credible. And the prospect becomes more willing to move forward.

12) Our [mention total number of users you have] users are solving [mention most important problem] with our software. How does this apply to your firm?

Sometimes you don't have time to ask a lot of probing questions. This helps you to cut to the chase.

Like the two questions above, this is a unique way to open a call more purposefully with a specific path in mind.

Time Decider

13) Based on the goals you described, I infer that implementing the software in this quarter will help you achieve your targets. How reasonable is this inference?

Getting a sense of the time scope for a sales opportunity is critical to your pipeline. And this question is one way you can deal with that uneasy concept.

This questions shows that you have listened during the sales call and you have made an intelligent inference. More importantly, the answer will reveal more about the prospect's quarterly targets and goals which will enable you to plan the account to win deals. And guess what: the potential customer will never say it's unreasonable!

14) The last time you made an investment of this nature, who had the final word on it and how long did it take?

With this question, you're not only interested in the final decision maker, but the time duration it takes for this decision maker to move forward.

And remember that you are looking at the last investment - which gives you a recent snapshot as to how the team operates presently. With this knowledge, you can act wisely to move the sales call forward

15) If you will not be moving forward with this, when will you know?

This is a tricky one. Because you position yourself as vulnerable. It's amazing how vulnerability can help you close the deal. Your goal is not the lose the deal; but it's a smart way to lower the barrier the prospect has.

Because essentially the questions says "it's okay if we do not move on with this, but when do I get to know this". Prospects see that they are not being pressured. And they are more willing to reveal their timelines

Money Maker

16) If something like this were to work for you, when would you like to get started?
This is a question Bubba Page, CEO of Outro shared with me.

What happens when we don't ask this question, according to Bubba is that "...you have people who may have purchased your product, but they just don't move forward because they were never asked to move forward. It's essentially that a lot of people need to be asked in order to continue to move forward."

This is the let's-move-on question. It allows prospects to essentially, whether or not they are interested or not, tell me in a way that will give me enough knowledge and insights [to know] if they are truly interested and to gauge their interests.

17) Based on [reiterate prospect's main challenge], you're losing [mention quantifiable loss] each month. How important is avoiding this loss in the next quarter?

Psychologist have found that humans are more motivated to take action by loss, than by gain. The goal of this question is to summarize the loss and tap into the potency of this motivation.

This question re-emphasizes that you're going to help them avoid losses. You tap into this psychological reality with this question to gauge the timeline needed to close the deal.

18) What would have to happen to prevent us from closing this deal?

The point of this question is to get to the core of any potential objections and address it as soon as possible.

The buyer may typically start answering vaguely, but as you probe further using this question as a hook, you'll be better positioned to get a financial commitment.

Breakup Decider

Unlike all the other questions I've shared, these final set of questions are not for the prospect. They are questions you ask yourself as a sales rep or leader before you break up with a warm prospect that has gone cold.

19) What is the cost of my follow up?

Not all follow-ups are the same. Some prospects are low-value touch in terms of follow ups. Take for example emails. It will take one email to reconnect with a cold lead to find out how the conversation can be moved forward.

However, sometimes some prospects will require a high-value touch when following up. You may need a series of calls or even face-to-face meetings to reconnect. The cost of high-value follow ups might not be worth it in the long run: it will result in further cash burn.

If you can deal with the true cost (which most often is the alternate time that I could have spent following up on other high quality leads), do not break up.

20) Have I reiterated the value proposition?

Prospects are busy folks. They have their own businesses to run and other priorities to commit to. And in the process, they sometimes get drained in an avalanche of information, including the benefits of our services.

So when the conversation is stuck at some point, make sure that you re-iterate the key ways in which your service will add value to their business.

21) Have I nudged the prospect to make a decision?

One thing is to never be shy to ask a prospect to make a decision regarding your services. When the prospect goes cold, I ask myself whether I've explicitly nudged her to make a decision.

And how long has that been? Nudging them adds value to the conversation and helps to re-gauge the prospect's level of interest.

Nothing is to be left to chance. When strategic nudges are unsuccessful, I consider redirecting my limited resources to other highly qualified prospects.