

ADVANCE THE SALE

**Now You Can Be
the One Seller
Buyers WANT to Talk to!**

DISCOVER
Questions™
Get You Connected

Volume 1

For Professional Sellers

Deb Calvert

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DISCOVER Questions™

Get You Connected



Analysis of over 10,000 sales calls.
25 years of observations and research.
8 types of questions to help you be
the 1 seller buyers WANT to talk to.

CHAPTER 1

Connect by Building Trust

You cannot form solid connections without a firm foundation of trust. Trust brings buyers and sellers together and keeps them together. A lack of trust inhibits buyers, and a breach in trust shuts them down completely. Trust is vital to forming buyer/seller connections.

When it comes to establishing trust, sellers start with a disadvantage. It isn't fair, but it's an unavoidable reality. The profession of selling has a blemished reputation. Buyers have been conditioned to proceed with caution when entering into relationships with sellers. Buyers assume sellers are money-motivated, tricky, slick and self-absorbed. All too often, sellers prove these perceptions to be true. So the rest of us have to compensate for untrustworthy ones who burn our buyers.

In order to gain and maintain the trust of buyers, sellers must act in a trustworthy manner at all times. Trust is so fragile that a 90% rate of being trustworthy simply isn't good enough. The buyer will remember the one out of 10 times you did not deliver in a trustworthy way.

The 12 Dimensions of Trust

100% trustworthy is a mighty high standard. On top of that, there's more to being trustworthy than you might expect. There are 12 different dimensions of trust that come into play. Knowing and being responsive in all 12 areas is what it takes to build and preserve trust. DISCOVER Questions™ can help you do exactly that.

These 12 Dimensions of Trust are explained in Illustration #1 on page 4. The descriptions following the table include how you can use questions to build trust in 12 ways. As you review the Dimensions of Trust, you may be

surprised by what’s included. Most of us start and end with a narrower definition focused on honesty and integrity. But understanding how trustworthiness is also evaluated on follow through, availability, self-assessment and more can help sellers improve the way they are perceived and received by their buyers.

The 12 Dimensions of Trust

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Competence | Seller’s skills & knowledge are commensurate with expected results. Seller strives to learn and increase competence. |
| Integrity | Seller consistently makes ethical choices regardless of convenience, profit, fun or other personal benefit. |
| Consistency | Seller is reliable, steady, predictable. Everyone knows what to expect from this person. Seller is someone you can count on. |
| Loyalty | Seller makes and keeps long-term commitments to individuals, teams and organizations; supports others at all times. |
| Availability | Seller makes time for needed conversations and listens without distractions. Seller is fully present in interactions. |
| Fairness | Seller uses objective criteria to evaluate situation or people. Does not exhibit favoritism, holds everyone to equal standards. |
| Decision-Making | Seller knows & shares decision-making criteria. Involves others in decision-making process. Explains rationale of decisions. |
| Follow Through | Seller delivers what has been promised. Honors agreements. Accepts responsibility if commitments are not kept. |
| Openness | Seller communicates with complete disclosure, doesn’t hold back information. Shares opinion even when it’s not popular. |
| Discretion | Seller respects confidentiality. Seller gets permission, uses care before sharing information with others. |
| Constructive Intent | Seller shares sensitive messages without causing defensiveness. Seller’s communication motives are not self-serving. |
| Accurate Self-Assessment | Seller understands and acknowledges his or her own limitations, seeks and accepts help when needed. |

These 12 Dimensions of Trust represent the 12 ways a seller can build or erode trust with buyers. Each associated action creates a connection or causes a disconnection. Knowing about all 12 Dimensions of Trust empowers a seller who wants strong connections founded in trust. Not knowing leads to buyer mistrust and seller confusion.

Confused sellers disconnect by responding ineffectively when buyers express a lack of trust. Buyers' suspicions or reservations may not seem warranted. The seller may not be able to pinpoint what action(s) led to diminished trust. The seller may also be reluctant to acknowledge how his or her own action(s) were a factor in diminishing the buyer's trust. Not understanding the 12 Dimensions of Trust can convolute the situation and result in misplaced blame instead of corrective action.

One common example is when a buyer says "This didn't work like you told me it would." The implied loss of trust could be related to the product's failure or to the seller's failure in setting reasonable expectations. Buyers start with the belief that sellers have exaggerated or made false claims about their products. Sellers who don't know all 12 Dimensions of Trust don't hold themselves accountable in this situation. Instead, they believe their products are unsatisfactory.

The problem with this scenario is two-fold. First, the buyer's trust is broken, the relationship is impaired, and the blame is reported internally as a dissatisfaction with the product. That means subsequent sales attempts are less likely. Second, the seller is not likely to self-correct, so this scenario will be recurring. With enough repetition, the seller will truly believe the product is flawed or inferior.

To avoid misplacing blame and to build trust, sellers need to become more self-aware and cognizant of the 12 Dimensions of Trust.

As you read more about each of the 12 Dimensions of Trust, note how several could be subjectively interpreted in different ways by different people.

This is why it's so important to ask quality questions to clarify and build trust. A seller who asks questions to understand how a buyer perceives a situation can help minimize any misunderstanding. Doing so prevents a breach of trust. Similarly, trust can be improved in every dimension when sellers ask questions about buyer expectations, preferences and needs.

Sellers can put questions to work with each dimension in these ways:

1. Competence

“Seller strives to learn and increase competence” is best demonstrated by asking questions. Being interested and curious naturally leads to asking questions. Buyers do not mind educating sellers, so long as the learning is proactive and improves a seller's ability to serve the buyer.

Sellers sometimes avoid asking questions because they don't want to seem uninformed. They opt, instead, to act on limited information. In the long run, this strategy usually backfires and can make a seller seem incompetent. You are always more effective when you ask questions to learn more about your buyer.

Questions demonstrate competence. Use what you know to build your knowledge and showcase your level of expertise. A seller who says “Tell me more about the sustainability initiatives you're planning” will seem far more competent than the one who neglects to ask.

2. Integrity

“Seller consistently makes ethical choices” seems straightforward. But two different people looking at the same situation from two different perspectives might interpret this differently. For example, a seller once sacrificed his entire weekend to undo an error so his customer's order would be perfectly executed. He literally worked day and night to get everything in place, and he fulfilled on over 99% of the order.

Unfortunately, as luck would have it, one of the few remaining products

with an error shipped to the buyer's own home address. When the buyer learned about the seller's sacrifice in trying to deliver, the buyer perceived the seller's actions as deceitful rather than as high integrity. Why? Because the seller did not tell the buyer what was going on ahead of time. He worked hard to avoid the embarrassment of admitting a mistake. He thought he acted with integrity by trying to make it right. The buyer felt differently.

Questions asked ahead of time would have helped the seller understand the buyer's perspective. Here's a question few sellers ask in their initial needs assessment: "In the unlikely event of an error, how and when would you like to be notified?" One seller who asked this question for the first time was pleasantly surprised when the buyer smiled and said "No one has ever asked me that before! Thank you for checking ahead of time just in case you need to know."



3. Consistency

"**Seller is reliable, steady, predictable**" sounds positive, but it could also be limiting at a time when buyers are demanding new ideas from sellers. To differentiate yourself from other reliable, steady, predictable sellers who show up and pitch products the same way every time, use quality questions to stimulate discussion and to make buyers think in new ways.

Consider asking your buyers what's working and should remain the same in the way you handle the account. Ask, too, what's not working and needs to change. Be reliable, steady and predictable in your desire to routinely meet your buyers' needs.

4. Loyalty

"**Seller supports others at all times**" includes providing what others want and need. As a seller, one powerful way to support buyers is by asking them questions to challenge their assumptions and help them discover alternate ways of addressing their problems.

A transactional order-taker who does not form relationships with buyers is done once the order is placed. But a seller who connects with buyers long term must show genuine interest and support to demonstrate and engender loyalty.

I recently switched hair salons for this very reason. My former stylist supported me by getting me in on short notice, and I enjoyed our conversations about our children and our travels. But I didn't feel she could "get me to the next level."

By contrast, my new stylist supported me right from the start. In our initial conversations, she challenged me when I said "I need to spend five minutes or less on styling my hair each morning." Her challenge was direct, and it made me think.

She asked "How's that been working for you so far?" and "What's more important – the amount of time or the image you present?"

Asking questions and listening actively to the responses is an investment of time, not a waste of time.

By taking time to help me work out my own competing priorities, she supported me in a way my former stylist did not.

Supporting your buyers means you help them through their difficulties and challenges. To support means "to supply with things necessary" and "to provide for." Your buyers don't exist to support you. They do business with sellers who can, in some way, support them. DISCOVER Questions™ give you a tool to support your buyers.

5. Availability

"Seller makes time for needed conversations and listens without distractions" is a particularly difficult assignment for sellers. In an informal poll of sales trainers and sales managers, the question "why don't more sellers ask more questions more often?" was answered over and over again with the responses "sellers don't have time" and "buyers don't have time." But by not asking

questions, sellers waste considerably more of their own time and the time of buyers as they present off-the-mark solutions and then regroup to make modified proposals and to overcome objections they should have anticipated and avoided.

Asking questions and listening actively to the responses is an investment of time, not a waste of time.

A seller who makes the time to conduct a thorough needs assessment and routinely checks in by asking follow-up questions builds trust and conveys availability and interest in the buyers' needs. This doesn't have to be laborious or time consuming. Just a few quality questions can turn every sales call into a trust-building connection.

6. Fairness

“Seller does not exhibit favoritism” means a seller will not make assumptions about one buyer based on the information gathered from another buyer. Giving each individual buyer an opportunity to describe his or her own wants, needs and interests builds trust by making him or her feel special. Additionally, this unique information enables the seller to provide more relevant solutions to each and every buyer.

To uncover the unique needs, wants and interests of each individual buyer necessitates asking quality questions yielding actionable information. Instead of clustering her buyers by age, income and marital status like her predecessor had, one sales agent for a retirement living community decided to “start from scratch” with each prospect. Even though the demographic profile was an accurate predictor for placement, this agent’s close rate was significantly higher. Why?



Because buyers felt, as one said, “We were treated here like people, not like old people being herded all together but like individual people who are unique and special.”

7. Decision-Making

“Seller involves others in decision-making process” happens when a seller is transparent and shares with the buyer what steps will be happening behind the scenes. One seller paid attention when an apprehensive buyer applied for a line of credit. The seller asked questions to understand the buyer’s reservations. This led to a thorough explanation of the screening process and the seller facilitating a call between the buyer and the credit manager. When the credit application was denied, the buyer understood why and expressed appreciation for the openness the seller exhibited. The buyer contrasted this to other sellers who divorced themselves from the process and refused to get involved, making it seem they didn’t really care.



8. Follow Through

“Seller honors agreements” is another potentially gray and subjective area. It is impossible to honor an agreement unless it is clearly and mutually understood by both parties. Asking questions to confirm who will do what can help ensure good follow through. Outlining action items, along with deliverable dates, is a good sales practice and should be followed by questions like “What have I missed?” and “What else would you like for me to do?”

Buyers expect sellers to support them by bringing new ways of looking at old problems.

9. Openness

“Seller shares opinion even when it’s not popular” has become a must-do practice of selling. Buyers expect sellers to support them by bringing new ways of looking at old problems. They also expect sellers to be candid and to fully disclose their own opinions. Because time is precious, buyers don’t want to do business with sellers who have nothing new to say.

One way to offer new information effectively is to ask strategic questions

prompting buyers to do their own thinking and discovering. This is particularly important for sellers who don't have entirely new ideas and for those who aren't sure how a buyer will react to a new idea. Questions can plant seeds, test the waters and open up the dialogue, making it easier for a seller to share opinions – even those which may not be well-received.

Asking “what alternatives have you considered?” and “what are your thoughts about ___?” create opportunities for opening up conversations. Before you share your opinion, you'll have insights into the buyer's likely reaction. This proactive step ensures empathy and effectiveness as you share your opinion.

10. Discretion

“Seller gets permission, uses care before sharing information with others” is a frequently missed dimension of trust. In an effort to close the deal, a seller sometimes divulges to a prospect what competitors are buying. This may be effective in getting a buyer's attention and even in compelling a close. But it also leaves a residual feeling of mistrust. If the seller is sharing the competitor's information, the buyer realizes his or her information might be shared, too.

Trust is built when questions are used to erect walls around what is confidential. Asking “Would you mind if I shared this?” is professional and courteous. Asking “How much can I share about you with your competitor?” is a fair response when a buyer asks a seller to share confidential information about someone else.

11. Constructive Intent

“Seller shares sensitive messages without causing defensiveness” is also commonly overlooked as sellers attempt to build trust with buyers. Without meaning to, sellers come across as insensitive because they haven't learned what triggers defensiveness or emotional responses in their buyers. This can happen when questions are poorly sequenced, ill-conceived or badly

crafted. Before we introduce DISCOVER Questions™, we'll look at how to craft questions so your constructive intent is conveyed.

Questions asked to uncover past issues between the buyer and seller companies, pet peeves the buyer may have and preferred service protocols help a seller to be proactive and avoid causing unproductive buyer reactions.

12. Accurate Self-Assessment

“**Seller seeks and accepts help when needed**” goes hand-in-hand with “strives to learn” and the first dimension of trust, competence. A seller must be competent and also willing to acknowledge his or her own deficits. Over-estimating one’s own abilities results in sub-par performance, delays and missed opportunities. Asking questions to understand what is expected and what alternatives are acceptable will help sellers see more clearly what resources they will need in order to fully satisfy their buyers.

Trust will be cemented by asking quality questions. This is true in selling relationships just as it is in personal relationships. Think about someone you trust. Consider the way he or she interacts with you. Chances are good the person you trust asks you thought-provoking questions and challenges your status quo. Chances are good, too, that you trust this individual more – and certainly not less – as a direct result of those questions.

We trust people who ask quality questions because questions convey personal interest. We are more willing to trust people who have taken time to be personally interested in us. Questions communicate our interest. Questions position us to deliver on all 12 Dimensions of Trust.

When a buyer trusts you, the idea of doing business with someone else loses its appeal. Trust is like super glue for buyer/seller relationships. Trust forms unbreakable bonds, and that’s the kind of connection you want with every buyer.

DISCOVER Questions™ Get You Connected was selected as a finalist for 2013 Top Sales & Marketing Book of the Year. Now you know why!

To read more about how YOU can become the one seller buyers actually WANT to talk to? Order **DISCOVER Questions™ Get You Connected** now at amazon.com –

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