

## The Art of Skillful Qualifying

As a trainer, consultant, and consumer I am constantly underwhelmed when sales people approach me in a store. I find they typically use one of a few approaches:

1. They stand and wait for me to ask questions.
2. They launch into a pitch about the product.
3. They attempt to make small talk to try to make me open up.

Each of these approaches is very ineffective and does nothing to help the customer move toward making a buying decision. If you really want to make a difference and demonstrate to your customer why they should buy from you need to take a different approach.

First of all, recognize that if you truly want to separate yourself from your competition you must fully understand their needs before you begin talking about a product. Unfortunately, this seldom happens in the retail sales situation. However, that can make it very easy for you to begin differentiating yourself from other retailers. Here's how you do it:

Ask questions.

- What brings you into our store?
- What reasons do you have for buying a...?
- What were you looking for in a...?
- Tell me about your current situation.
- Who else is involved in this purchase?
- What deadlines are you working with?
- What is most important to you with this purchase?
- Where else have you been?
- What else have you seen?
- What was your experience at...?

Each of these questions gives you the chance to uncover the customer's buying motives. Every time you learn more about your customer the closer you get to actually closing a sale providing you utilize that information properly.

You'll notice that the above questions are all open ended which means they require the customer to respond with more than just a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Open-ended questions serve two purposes;

1. They require the customer to think before responding. This means that you will receive quality information that will help you determine their specific needs and wants.

2. They actively engage the customer. This means that they will begin to feel more comfortable with you because they are actually participating in the buying/selling process.

The critical thing to remember is that virtually everyone in the world loves talking about themselves and the more you encourage the customer to talk about themselves or their situation the more they will begin to trust and open up to you.

The majority of retail sales staff do not appreciate the power of this approach. In my training workshops I frequently hear objections such as:

*“This takes too long. I need to spend my time overcoming objections.”*  
*“People get defensive when I ask them all these questions.”*  
*“Customers only care about getting the best price.”*

I definitely understand these objections. Effective qualifying **does** take time. Some people **do** get defensive. And some customers **do** care only about getting the best price. However, this approach will garner you different results.

First of all, the time you invest qualifying will be saved in presenting your product and trying to overcome objections. If you fully understand what your customer needs and want you will be able to show them a product/service that meets those needs. This means that they will have fewer objections. I have discovered that the more thoroughly you qualify a customer the less likely they will express objections.

Second, if you create a comfortable environment people will answer any question you ask. But you must give them a reason to do so. They must see that the question(s) you are asking are leading somewhere and are being asked for a specific reason.

Third, you need to determine if the price conscious customer is someone you really want as a client.

Skillful qualifying takes effort, energy and practice. I suggest that you develop a list of open-ended questions that are relevant to your industry and practice utilizing them. The more comfortable you become asking valuable questions the more effective you will be become at uncovering your customer’s needs and wants. In turn, you will demonstrate to them why they should buy from you, today, at your price.

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