

# Selling. It's just a chat

Although good bread winners are personable, flamboyant and competitive types, Peter Rosenwald believes they are also dogmatic questioners.



By Peter Rosenwald

The accepted approach to selling professional services face to face is to create rapport and discover a hook to hang your services on by asking lots of interesting questions. After spending years sitting with accountants and lawyers as they sell their wares it is clear that the very best 'bread winners' go a lot further than this. They use paths of questions, designed to uncover desire for specific services, only moving from one path to another when they are satisfied that they have discovered enough. This is very different from the normal approach, where the conversation is an opportunistic understanding of a prospective client's whole situation hopefully uncovering needs along the way.

I have drawn from 25 years of business development training and management. Some ideas have come from my favourite book on business development, *How To Master the Art Of Selling*, by Tom Hopkins, other concepts (particularly the Question Designer) can be traced to Charles D Brennan Jr's book *Sales Questions That Close the Sale* both available at Amazon. The approach which we have used to particularly help accountants and lawyers, is called 'The Architect of Needs', for which there

are two parts. Firstly, an understanding of how the paths work 'The Questioning Filter', and secondly, a methodology to develop questions around your services, 'The Question Designer'.

I will start with Questioning Filters (diagram 1). The objective of the filter is to create desire for a service or group of services. At the top of the filter the experts start with general Open Questions which lead into a discussion about their prospects business, situation or department. Then they direct people, once again through questions, down specific paths, their objective is to find whether a situation exists for which their service can help. For example, a lawyer may

start with "I see there have been quite a few changes in the industry, I was hoping you could tell me what changes you've seen and how they are affecting your business?" From this a general dialogue follows from which specific paths can develop, (such as debt recovery). "You mentioned some parts of the industry suffering; it would be interesting to know how you invoice for work, the terms you offer and whether payment schedules have changed?" Leading to a specific discussion on debt, the experts will then dig deeper to try to find reasons why the business may want to reduce their exposure to customer debt. Whether or not a need is discovered the expert will then go down another path. For example,

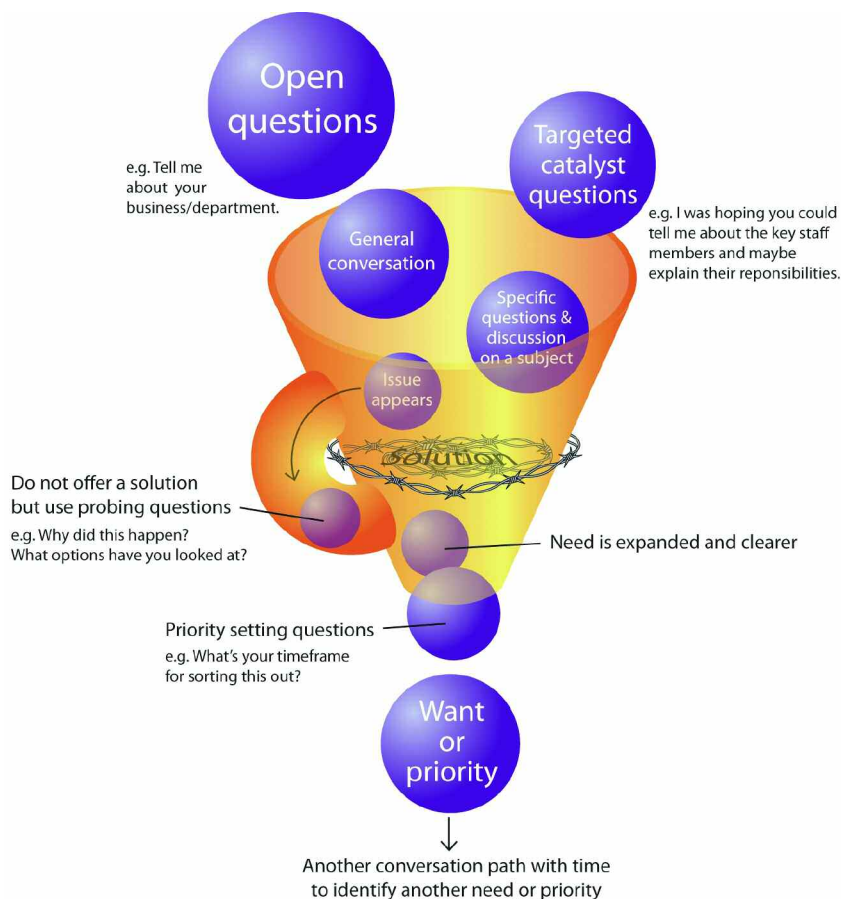


Diagram 1: Questioning Filters

Question Designer			
This example is a Tax Product called an EMI. Key employees can be paid an uplift in their salary in a tax efficient way, they can also gain some shares in the company as long as objectives are achieved such as profit targets			
Service	Advantages	Situation	Questions
EMI	Retains key employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower recruitment costs</li> <li>• Retains intellectual capital etc.</li> <li>• Retains long term clients</li> <li>• Business more saleable with key staff in place</li> <li>• Key people focus on profit rather than turnover.</li> <li>• Greater motivation.</li> </ul> Etc.	High turnover, high recruitment .  Worried about competitors gaining their team. Or need the team to achieve objectives.  Key people have authority over key clients.  Wants to sell.  Wants to drive profit / margin from the company rather than turnover.	I was hoping you could tell about your key staff and what influence they have over profit?  Out of curiosity, what roles would these key people have in say three to five years?  Out of interest what would happen if one of these left, possibly went to a competitor?  Have you ever lost key staff in the past? What happened?  What ambitions have you got for the business?  Do you mind talking about profit for a minute? What plans do you have for improving the profit and what has to change to achieve your goals?

you know the situations you are looking for you just have to design questions that will lead people in the right direction.

In the first column is the service name with sub classifications of the service or features, the second column a list of all the advantages your service or that feature can give

anyone in any situation. In the third column you have to consider the scenario that people would need to be in to benefit from the advantage. Once dealt with then you simply create questions that will establish whether your prospective client is in a situation to benefit from your service or not.

Cross Selling has been an interesting application of the 'Architect of Needs'. As we all know one of the blocks to cross selling is knowledge of what other departments do, or the situations that clients need to be in to benefit from other departments services. The key is to get, for example, the commercial property team to list all their services, work through the 'Architect of Needs' and then invite other departments or partners to lunch, where they can be taught what to look for and identify a few questions to throw into the conversation.

In conclusion, the very good bread winners are not just lovely, personable, flamboyant, ruthlessly efficient and competitive types. They are also dogmatic questioners, following a line of questioning right the way through to a conclusion, to identify where there is a need or not. However because they are flamboyant and socially rounded they manage to give the impression of just having a chat.

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there are currently many professional practices, such as large law firms, approaching senior decision makers, in larger businesses, with a sector specialism but a generalist approach, ie. "we are great at Motor Retail and we can solve all your needs". A questioning path may therefore have been about Debt Collection, by picking up on the responses of the prospective client a further questioning path could have been opened up on, for example, employment.

Beware not to get lulled into offering solutions to problems or issues when they become evident. The objective of the filter is to uncover the desire, NOT to field it. Too often I have heard people say 'I recently came across exactly this problem with one of our clients; let me tell you how we dealt with it!!' This strategy of offering a solution is so serious that it's like putting razor wire across the sales process. The trick is to move down the filter by asking probing questions, 'why is it an issue, what have you done about it, how do your co directors feel about it' and more. This probing allows you to understand the issue or requirement in more detail and helps you decide whether the issue is likely to be a priority or not.

Finally there are clever questions which experts ask to illicit whether the issue is a priority or just a run of the mill irritant. We have called these Priority Setting Questions (very often they are groups of questions) an example could be 'give me a time frame for when you want to get this sorted' followed

by 'so what happens if you don't get it done by then?'

Before moving away from the Filter, we found some very interesting questions which we've called Catalyst Questions. We've found that people use them once the relationship has been established, they are necessarily complex questions and therefore, if asked early on in a conversation can sound a little heavy. The nth degree of Catalyst Questions is to refer to something the prospective client has said and then ask a two part question to elicit a big answer. For example, 'Out of interest you mentioned times have been tough, I was hoping you could tell me, with reference to employee numbers, what steps you have taken so far and what lies in store?' The beauty of these questions is that they illicit far more information from the prospective client than two standard Open questions. We think this is because the prospective client has been challenged and has to think and therefore gives a full answer. To hear a two minute introduction to catalyst questions go to <http://tiny.cc/catqu> (you will need sound).

The second part to the 'Architect of Needs' is the Question Designer above.

This is a reworking of the standard sales model of Features Functions and Benefits. The essence of the Question Designer is to understand your service so well that you can spot every situation that will lead someone to want that service. Then once