



Questions Are The Answers

By Mike Stewart, CSP

As a sales trainer focusing on the development of new business, I know that in most interactions the person asking the questions is the person in control because people are conditioned to answer questions.

This principle is the foundation of consultative selling. It is the basis for my conviction that "Discovery is the Heart of the Sale," as I teach in my training, coaching, and speeches.

Most skilled salespeople, and other influential people, understand this principle and apply it continuously. Their ability to ask good questions, probe, drill deeper, listen carefully to the answers and act on new information is usually the secret to their success.

Successful salespeople and other good conversationalists are masters of using the power of questions to influence the decisions and behaviors of others. We need to pause and realize that we, too, are on automatic pilot in this regard. The decisions we make and the actions we take are routinely and deeply influenced by the questions we are answering all day, every day. This is true whether we are the one asking the questions or someone else is.

For example, if your boss asks, "Why aren't you selling more?" she is not only refocusing you to be defensive, she is reinforcing any negative presuppositions you may have about your abilities as a salesperson. Such a question may easily lead you to try to transfer blame and responsibility to someone else, or "the system." All of these move you into a negative state of being and are definitely goal obstructing.

A much better question would be, "What do you need to do in order to sell more?"

This is an empowering question that:

- Moves you into an expectant state of awareness,
- Encourages you to take personal responsibility for your own performance,
- Focuses you on finding creative answers, and

- Leads to productive action.

All of these move you into a positive state of being and are definitely goal enhancing.

Although you have little control over the questions others ask, you do have control over:

- How you perceive, and re-state, others' questions, and
- The questions you ask yourself.

Because you are responsible for your own performance and your own destiny, think about and take charge of others' questions. Don't forfeit control of your own life to others by allowing them to control the questions. Take control yourself.

For example, instead of internalizing your boss' negative question, "Why aren't you...?" what would have happened if you had said, or at least thought to yourself, "Bad question! The real question should be, "What do I need to do...?"

***"You are today where your thoughts have brought you;
you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you."
– James Allen***

You are continually conditioning and reconditioning yourself through your incessant self-talk. The questions you ask yourself can have much deeper and far-reaching impact than the questions other people may ask you. Often your own questions are prompted by the questions of others as you delve into their meaning and the consequences your answers have on your life.

Think about the questions you ask yourself and be sure they are goal enhancing and not goal obstructing.

- Instead of asking, "Why can't I?"
- Ask, "How can I?"
- Instead of asking, "Whose fault is this?"
- Ask, "What can I do to fix it and make it right?"
- Instead of asking, "What happened?"
- Ask, "When can I take action to make sure it happens right?"

Finally, don't let others beat you up with their questions. When my son Mark was a teenager and messed up, I would often ask with exasperation, "Mark, what is wrong with you?" His usual reply became, "Gee, I don't know, Dad. Just stupid, I guess. It runs in the family."

Mark always made me laugh, he wouldn't let me beat him up, and he taught me a lot about asking better

questions.

***"Ask and you shall receive."
- The Bible***

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International sales trainer and consultant, Mike Stewart, CSP, specializes in hiring and developing high-performance sales teams. He is a leading authority in diagnosing and overcoming Sales Call Reluctance. To learn more about Mike and the services and products his company offers, go to www.StewartSalesDynamics.com.

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If you are a member of the media and would like to interview Mike or feature more of his articles in your publication, please contact him at Mike@StewartSalesDynamics.com or 1-866-515-0022.