Seven Questions To Transform Client Conversations

Here are seven client scenarios with questions that can really help you transform the conversation.

1. Scenario one: You are trying to get to know someone early on in the relationship.

This question is especially effective with an older executive. **Question:** "*How did you get your start in business*?" This question invites the other person to share their personal "story." I've had fascinating conversations with clients after asking this question—and learned important information about them.

2. Scenario Two: You are meeting with a prospective client for the very first time, and they are cool and defensive.

Let's say you have a prospect who is giving short, vague answers to every question. They have the attitude "So, what do YOU really have to offer me?" Put on a very relaxed smile and ask this **Question:** *"I am sure there was a good reason why you took this appointment. What interested you in speaking with me?"* This question forces the other person to get to what is really on their mind, (or, possibly, there is nothing that you can help them with…in which case you may just have to agree to stay in touch).

3. Scenario Three: You are trying to understand your client's critical needs, priorities, or goals—but not getting enough clarity.

You have a prospect or client who isn't that forthcoming about what their priorities are. Maybe you just don't know each other well enough. **Question:** *"I'm curious, how will you be evaluated at the end of the year?"* If they question why you want to know (which is actually quite unlikely), you can say: "I ask all my clients this question. The more I understand about what's important to you in driving your business forward, the more I can be of help to you."

4. Scenario Four: You are asked, "So tell me about your Company."

Do not assume you know what the other person is really interested in hearing about. Chances are you will share a lot of information they do not care about. Instead, first ask this **Question:** "*What particular aspect of our company would you like me to talk about?"* A key goal of "Consultative Selling" is to better understand your client. This question enables you to tailor your response and be more effective.

5. Scenario Five: You have a meeting with an unspecified agenda—or, you'd like to expand the agenda to make sure it is truly relevant.

Sometimes a prospect wants to talk for half an hour with no fixed agenda - but I want to make sure we are focusing on what is really important to them. **Question:** *"From your perspective, what is the most valuable way to use this meeting?"*

Alternatively, sometimes I ask, *"From your perspective, what is the most important issue you want to make sure we discuss?"* These questions allow the client to tell you what is really important for them right now and how they want to use the time with you. You would be amazed at the valuable information this simple question can reveal.

6. Scenario Six: You want to engage on an emotional/personal level.

Some questions are rational/analytical. For example: *"How are you planning to implement this strategy?"* Others—and these are often the most interesting and powerful—are emotional or personal. **Question:** *"As you think about the various initiatives you have underway, I'm curious—what are you personally most enthusiastic about?"*

Other sample emotional/personal questions:"
• *"How will this programme impact you personally?"*
• "*What is your greatest concern about how this initiative is going?"*
• "*What is the most fulfilling part of your job? The least fulfilling?"*

7. Scenario Seven: You want to understand higher-level goals, not just tactics.

Clients often come to you with a "problem," which is just a symptom of something larger. But you need to understand the higher-level goal.

Let's say a client comes to me and says, "We would like to do a trusted advisor training event." My first **Question is:** *"Why do you want to do that?"* Asking "why?" gets you up to the higher-level business driver or goal. That is why Sakichi Toyoda told his engineers, in the early days of Toyota, to always ask

"Why?" five times about any quality problem. If you do, he said, you will understand the root cause of the problem and, most likely, the right solution.

Remember: When you prepare for a client meeting, invest serious time in formulating the questions you are going to ask. It requires real effort to develop the thoughtful questions that are just right for your particular meeting

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