



THE 21 BEST SALES QUESTIONS FOR MASTERING
LEAD QUALIFICATIONS & ACCELERATING SALES

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Intro

Why Should You Sell Like Socrates?

The philosopher Socrates was famous for asking disciplined questions of his students in order to provoke thoughts, help them analyze concepts and get to the truth of issues.

So what does this have to do with selling? When you get on the phone with a prospect, you have an agenda. Qualification isn't just about assessing prospects' needs, pain points, budget and timeline. It's also about helping them imagine the better reality that's available to them by purchasing your solution.

Like you, Socrates knew where he wanted his students to arrive. But instead of simply lecturing them, he realized that he could lead them to epiphany by asking a series of questions in the right order.

Selling like Socrates won't just help you do a better job qualifying leads - it will also help you build rapport, help your prospects see the value in your solution, and help you move deals forward faster than ever before.

By taking a Socratic approach to Sales, you'll virtually never have to do any hard selling. You'll also deal with far fewer sales objections and shorten your sales cycles.

Questions to Identify Prospects' Needs & Challenges

To sell like Socrates, don't just ask what prospects are interested in buying. Instead, start with broad questions that can get them to divulge information about their industry and the challenges they're facing, while simultaneously building a relationship. Your prospects are likely to reveal valuable information about their company, industry and specific pain points that can help you (1) see if they are qualified, and (2) build rapport.

What are challenges are you looking to solve?

At its core, Sales is all about solving problems. More often than not, prospects seek change in order to help alleviate pain that they're experiencing with a current solution or lack thereof. The first step to helping prospects is to find out their goals. This is a good question because it puts your prospect in the driver's seat. You're positioning yourself as helping them to solve problems. The best salespeople tend to be the ones who can make their prospects feel like teammates.

How have you tried to solve that problem so far?

Their answer to this question is likely to give you lots of insight into where in the buying cycle they

are, as well as how their organization is structured (if you are selling to a company). For instance, are they investigating other solutions? Are they trying to cobble together budget? Are they trying to get buy-in from key decision makers?

What led you to want to make a change now?

Identifying catalysts that are driving a desire to implement change is incredibly important to your strategy. For example, did they just get budget for a solution? Is your prospect a new hire with a mandate for change? Do they have a lease or policy set to expire? Their answer can help you to identify how big of a priority buying your solution is.

How has your industry changed in the past few years?

This is one of the broadest B2B Sales questions, but it helps build rapport. Most people enjoy talking about their job. This open-ended question can inspire prospects to reveal all kinds of information about their industry, company, pain points and goals, without requiring you to ask those pointed questions individually.

Questions That Define Budget, Authority, & Timeline

When you're selling to companies, there are always a lot of details you'll need to uncover in order to further qualify leads and facilitate deals.

You'll need to uncover who the stakeholders are in each deal, whether your prospect has budget, whether they are under contract with their current vendor, and when they are looking to implement change. Knowing these details and others will help you build a better strategy.

Questions about Authority

IN ADDITION TO YOURSELF, WHO ELSE AT YOUR COMPANY IS FACING THESE PROBLEMS?

The purpose of this question is to define stakeholders. In B2B Sales there may be 5 or even 10 decision makers involved in any given deal. It's important to quickly ascertain who all the key stakeholders are. Try to figure out, if possible, who the primary decision maker is and who are the influencers. Every corporate structure is different, so remember that sometimes the decision maker with the most pull might not be who you think. For example, in some cases a well-respected developer might have as much or more influence as an executive.

ARE THERE ANY ISSUES THAT [OTHER STAKEHOLDERS] MIGHT BE CONCERNED WITH?

Imagine you're selling to a Chief Marketing Officer. She seems absolutely sold on your company's value proposition. However, she mentioned that the CIO and CFO are also stakeholders in the deal. These other decision makers are bound to have some different concerns than the CMO. Asking what issues might concern other decision makers can help you better prepare a presentation that captivates those stakeholders.

WHAT'S YOUR PURCHASING PROCESS?

When selling to companies, it's of particular strategic importance to be aware of a prospective company's buying process. Does a CEO need to sign off on deals? Does their company prefer to start small with pilot programs? Would setting up a group meeting with all the key stakeholders be beneficial? Rather than asking all of these questions individually, simply ask your prospect their process for reaching a purchasing decision. They'll likely talk you through their entire process and give you valuable information that can help you facilitate the deal.

Advice from Craig Wortmann



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3 Things You Need to Discover During the First Conversation

Sales professionals need to ask three key qualification questions in the FIRST meeting with a prospect. Not in the first ten seconds, but before the first hour is over:

- How would a decision like this be made?
(‘Are you the decision-maker?’)
- What’s the timeframe for getting this done?
(‘Will you do this in a time-frame that makes sense for me and us?’)
- What is the budget for an effort like this?
(‘What is the budget for an effort like this!!??’)

These are the three foundational qualification questions upon which a sale should continue to be built. Without strong answers, you are building on sand.

Questions That Define Budget, Authority, & Timeline

Questions about Budget

ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR ESTABLISHING BUDGET?

This question is a great segue that enables you to move from talking about authority to discussing budget. Ultimately, it pays to know who has the power of purse. If you end up meeting a pricing objection, you'll know exactly who you need to talk to about getting additional budget. Remember that budgets are decided by different stakeholders at different companies. If you're selling marketing automation software, at one company you may need to have a budgetary discussion with a VP of marketing, whereas at another company you may need to talk to a CFO.

DO YOU ALREADY HAVE A BUDGET ALLOCATED?

Often, a company will have a specific budget set aside for purchasing solutions. That knowledge not only tells you volumes about their timing, but also enables you to be strategic about potential upselling and cross-selling opportunities. Also, even if prospects don't reveal what their budget is, knowing that they have a budget in place should help you understand how sales-ready they are.

WHAT ARE YOU IDEALLY LOOKING TO INVEST?

Instead of asking prospects what they'd like to "spend," help them to see purchasing your solution as an "investment." You can often simultaneously ascertain their budget and launch into a conversation about what ROI they can expect when using your product. This is powerful because it can often help you bust pricing objections before they even arise. It also puts the onus on you to discuss ROI for that investment, so be prepared.

Questions about Competition

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN WITH [COMPETITIVE VENDOR]?

Before you identify which other new vendors your prospect might be talking to, you should try to discover their relationship with their current vendor (if one exists). Has their current solution provider disappointed them in any way? Then, try to hone in on some ways that your solution can exceed their current experience.



Questions That Define Budget, Authority, & Timeline

WHAT SORT OF POSITIVE FINANCIAL IMPACT HAS YOUR CURRENT SOLUTION HAD ON YOUR BUSINESS?

According to Peter Gracey, CEO of QuotaFactory, it's not your basic qualification questions, but your follow-up questions that tell you the true value of an opportunity. According to Gracey, "What are you currently using?" is great, but it tells you nothing. Follow that up with 'What sort of positive financial impact has that solution had on your organization?' and you'll get someone saying something real."

ARE YOU LOOKING AT ANY OTHER SOLUTION PROVIDERS AT THE MOMENT?

It's important to identify whether your prospect is considering any other vendors. Most prospects will have no problem telling you the name of the other competitors they are looking at. If they do, you can discuss key advantages you have over those competitors. You can even email them collateral that shows ways that your solution beats the competitors they are looking at. But if you do, remember that it can potentially be forwarded to your competitor. If you do send it, keep it broad and based on value - that way you won't help them develop plays to beat you. Tracking which competitors you are consistently going up against

in your CRM can also be quite useful, as your sales team can develop plays to win against those specific competitors.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY WE COMPARE TO OTHER SOLUTIONS?

This question is powerful because it can immediately let you know where sticking points in the deal might be. Does your company lack a key feature that a competitor is offering? Is another competitor beating your price? This question also helps you gauge which deals are most likely to close, in order to help you prioritize your efforts. As a salesperson, it's vital to make as accurate predictions as possible to ensure that you hit your numbers. If the prospect seems satisfied with your feature set and price point - and they like you and feel you are trying to help and understand them - it can be an indicator that a deal is more likely to close.

Advice from Peter Gracey



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On Asking Questions That Help You Beat the Competition

Asking, 'What are you currently using?' is great, but it tells you nothing. Follow that up with "What sort of positive financial impact has that solution had on your organization?" and you'll get someone saying something real.

Questions That Define Budget, Authority, & Timeline

Timing/Implementation Questions

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, WHEN WOULD YOU IMAGINE YOURSELF IMPLEMENTING THIS SOLUTION?

Asking your prospect when they envision implementation does two important things. First, it allows them to give you insight into their implementation timeframe. This is great because it helps you to qualify and prioritize leads. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it enables prospects to cast budgetary questions aside and imagine their future life as your customer.

DO YOU HAVE A CURRENT SOLUTION IN PLACE? IF SO, WHEN IS YOUR CURRENT CONTRACT SET TO EXPIRE?

If your prospect has a current vendor in place, you're going to want to find out if they're under contract. They might reveal that their contract is set to expire in three weeks. This can let you know that you should do everything in your power to get that deal firmed up before then or as soon as possible. Conversely, you might catch prospects during an exploration phase. Their contract may be set to expire in six months. This could mean that the lead is not yet qualified for sales and is in need of additional nurturing over the next few months.

DOES YOUR TEAM HAVE THE TIME AND RESOURCES IN PLACE NECESSARY TO HANDLE IMPLEMENTATION?

Depending on the complexity of your offering, the time and resources necessary to handle implementation are going to vary. For example, some SaaS solutions may require training, administration, custom development and more. Make sure that prospects understand the scope of implementation. Then, do your best to deduce whether implementation can be possible in the near-term. If your prospect doesn't have the resources for implementation at the moment, it could mean that the deal has to be put on hold until those resources become available.

By the time you ask that final question, "So do we have a deal?" your prospects will already have realized how much they need and want your offerings.

Questions That Help Prospects Envision a Better Reality

Before closing, it's important to help your prospects focus on the value of your solution. There are always a lot of logistics in B2B sales: pricing, implementation costs, technical requirements, etc. But once your prospect is convinced that your solution can truly add value, those logistical concerns are far easier to work out. So instead of simply asking prospects to discuss their issues, also ask some questions that inspire them to imagine a cure for their pain points. Empower your prospects to imagine the better world that is waiting for them.

Questions to Help Prospects Think About the Future

SAY YOU HAD NO BUDGETARY RESTRICTION – WHAT KIND OF CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE HAPPEN?

It's common for prospects to want to cut to the chase and talk pricing right away. But price points are virtually always going to seem too high until your prospects truly understand the value of your solution. Prior to talking about pricing, it's important to understand your prospect's business, and what their pain points are. It's also important to help them to imagine your solution solving their pain points. At the end of the process, you and your prospect should feel

as though you are working together to bring about transformation.

SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH ALL OF THAT EXTRA TIME/MONEY AFTER MAKING A CHANGE?

Part of leading prospects to epiphany is getting them to envision themselves having a better life by using your solution. Asking them to envision the benefits of your offering is quickest way to help them to realize its true value. Once they've already envisioned a better life with your offering, it becomes a lot easier to make a sale.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T ARRIVE AT A DECISION?

It's vital to not only get your prospects to imagine the benefits of your offering, but also to envision the consequences of not resolving issues. Allow them to envision the productivity or revenue that could get lost by not implementing your solution. Imagining the consequences of not initiating change can often inspire prospects to come to a decision faster.

Questions That Help Prospects Envision a Better Reality

WHEN WOULD BE THE BEST TIME FOR OUR NEXT MEETING, AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE THE GOALS OF THAT MEETING TO BE?

Always try to move deals forward. At the end of a conversation, don't merely schedule a time and sign off. Go the extra mile and establish specific goals that your prospect wishes to accomplish at the next meeting. This can help ensure you're adequately prepared. For example, suppose a prospect mentions that at the next meeting he's bringing his CIO to discuss the technical aspects of implementation. You could potentially bring an engineer on the call who is an expert in the more technical aspects of your product. Or make certain that you're armed with the relevant specs that the CIO will be interested in looking at. Being overly prepared for each meeting is one of the best ways to shorten sales cycles.

Advice from Elay Cohen



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SalesHood: How Winning Sales Managers Inspire
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On the Importance of Understanding What Drives Your Prospects' Business

Inject the words 'curiosity' and 'discovery' into your
sales values.

Why ringDNA

Improve rep productivity, increase sales opportunities, and close more deals with the leading AI-powered sales engagement platform.


**Hewlett Packard
Enterprise**

—
296%

more sales opportunities



—
100%

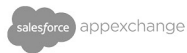
of sales activities logged into Salesforce



—
13%

instant increase in demos booked

TOP RATED FROM



AS SEEN ON



Drive Better Sales Outcomes



Prioritize

The perfect touchpoint for every contact, every time.



Engage

Every tool you need to fuel smarter sales conversations.



Optimize

AI-powered insights to make every rep a top performer.



Accelerate

Close more deals with greater efficiency and effectiveness.



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