

The Perfect Combination of Selling Skills

“Me and Jenny goes together like peas and carrots.” Forest Gump

In sales, probing and listening are peas and carrots. These skills are the perfect diet for salespeople. Our study of salespeople in the top 10% of their companies found probing and listening played a major role in their success. Successful salespeople invest more time during a sales call probing than pitching or closing. Salespeople ask questions to discover customer needs, build relationships, and help buyers discover what they do not know. To ask better questions . . .

1. Use open-ended questions. These begin with why, how, what, and tell me about. Open-ended questions relax the buyer, as they engender an interview versus an interrogation. Closed-ended questions begin with which, when, who, and where. They limit the range of responses. Too many closed-ended questions become an interrogation.
2. Probe for pain. Pain motivates. People change when they are miserable enough in their current situation. Dig for areas that cause the buyer to feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied with the status quo.
3. Probe for hope. If you dig for pain, follow up with hope questions. Dig for ways the buyer would like to improve his or her situation. The implication is that your solution can deliver on this hope.

Asking questions requires listening. It is not enough to know the customer's needs; you must understand these needs. This comes from deep and patient listening. Deep and patient listening immerses you into what the other person says. To become a better listener . . .

1. Open your ears, eyes, mind, and heart. Hear, see, know, and feel what the buyer says. Full-sensory listening requires you to focus on the other person.
2. Practice patience. Listen as the other person unravels problems for you. Unraveling is a process, not a shopping list. What's your hurry?
3. Listen on two levels—organizational and personal. Even technical sales include personal issues for the buyer. Customers prefer to buy what they need from salespeople who understand what they want. What represents a personal win for the buyer?

Ironically, research has shown that listeners versus talkers are rated as more influential by their peers. You can listen your way to success—one question at a time.

Plan to join us at the next [Value-Added Selling seminar](#) at our training center in St. Louis so you can learn more about the perfect combination of selling skills.

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