

PROFESSIONAL SALESMANSHIP – LECTURE 6

CHAPTER 6 – Communication Skills

Objectives

After completing this module, you should be able to

1. Explain the importance of collaborative, two-way communication in trust based selling.
2. Explain the primary types of questions and how they are applied in selling.
3. Illustrate the diverse roles and uses of strategic questioning in trust-based selling.
4. Identify and describe the five steps of the ADAPT questioning sequence.
5. Discuss the four sequential steps for effective active listening.
6. Discuss the superiority of pictures over words for explaining concepts and enhancing comprehension.
7. Describe the different forms of nonverbal communication.

SALES COMMUNICATION AS A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

People and organizations don't just buy products. They look for what makes them happy and the good stuff they get from certain product features. Normal selling is like just talking to customers, but trust-based selling is like having a chat with them. Trust-based selling is when both the buyer and the seller talk and work together to figure out what the buyer needs and how to help them best. Even though trust-based selling is the main way of selling nowadays, some salespeople and companies still use old-fashioned and sneaky selling methods.

Trust-based sales communication is when both the buyer and the seller share ideas and understand each other through talking back and forth. The goal isn't just to agree but to really get what each other is saying. Good communication is key in every step of selling. You need to talk well to find out what the buyer wants and show them how your solution is better than others. The most important skills for good selling are asking questions, listening, giving information, using

body language, and writing well. These skills are important in everyday life, but they're super important in trust-based selling.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION: QUESTIONING

There are two main ways to take charge of a sales chat. One way is to keep on talking, and the other is to subtly guide the conversation by asking smart questions. In the article "Professional Selling in the 21st Century: Importance of Preparation and Well Thought Out Questions," it's emphasized that successful salespeople need to be really good at figuring out what they need to know and planning the questions to ask. They should know exactly what info they need and what type of question will get that info from a potential buyer.

Asking purposeful questions can make buyers think and give detailed info about their current situation, needs, and what they expect. This extra info is important for both the buyer and the seller. Good questions can help both sides understand a problem and how to solve it. For instance, questions can get meaningful feedback about the buyer's feelings and how they're making their decision to buy.

Asking questions also shows that you're interested in the buyer and what they need, and it gets them involved in the selling process. Questions can also be used to steer the conversation back on track if it starts to drift. Similarly, questions can smoothly move the discussion to a different topic and help guide the buyer's thoughts and decisions in a logical way.

Types of Questions Classified by Amount and Specificity of Information Desired

Open-End Questions

Open-end questions, also known as nondirective questions, are made to let the customer answer freely. This means the customer can say more than just a few words and can share personal or business details. Open-end questions make buyers think more and give lots of info, more than

closed-end questions do. So, salespeople use these questions to find out more about what the customer needs and expects in detail.

Closed-End Questions

Closed-end questions are made to make the customer answer with just one or two words. They're usually used to double-check or make sure of info from earlier answers to open-end questions. While the most common type is a yes/no question, closed-end questions can come in different forms, as long as the answer is short.

Dichotomous/Multiple-Choice Questions

Dichotomous questions and multiple-choice questions are more direct ways of asking. With these questions, customers have to pick from a few options. They're used in selling to find out what customers like and to help them decide what to buy.

Types of Questions Classified by Strategic Purpose

Probing Questions

Probing questions are made to dig deeper than just basic info. They aim to get more specific and clear details that help find out what the customer needs and figure out the best solution.

Evaluative Questions

Evaluative questions use both open-ended and closed-ended formats to make sure and to find out what the prospect thinks and prefers. They're meant to do more than just gather basic facts. These questions help uncover how the prospect sees things and what they feel about their current situation and what they want.

Tactical Questions

Tactical questions are used to change the subject of conversation if it's going off track or if a certain line of questioning isn't helpful. For instance, if a salesperson is asking about a company's plans for expansion but the prospect can't share that info yet, they might ask a different question

to steer the conversation in a better direction. This helps avoid any awkwardness and keeps the discussion useful for both parties.

Reactive Questions

Reactive questions are ones that come up because of what the other person said before. They're used to get more info, dive deeper into a topic, and keep the conversation going smoothly.

As we mentioned earlier, closed-ended questions are useful in selling, but they're mainly for making things clear or getting a yes or no answer, not for finding out new stuff or digging deeper. Another problem with using too many closed-ended questions is that it can feel like you're grilling someone rather than having a real conversation.

Strategic Application of Questioning in Trust-Based Selling

Having good questioning skills is really important in selling, and they're used all the time in every stage of the selling process. Salespeople use different kinds of questions to achieve different goals:

1. **Get Buyers Involved:** Instead of talking too much, salespeople use planned questions to get buyers to join in the conversation and work together.
2. **Make People Think:** Coming up with new and smart solutions needs everyone to really think hard. So, asking strategic questions gets both buyers and sellers to think deeply about the situation.
3. **Collect Information:** Good questions come from planning ahead and are aimed at filling in the gaps between what we know and what we need to know.
4. **Clarify and Highlight:** Instead of assuming, questions can make sure everyone understands and focuses on the important parts of the conversation.

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5. Show Interest: When buyers talk, salespeople ask more questions related to what was said to show they care and understand.

6. Confirm Understanding: Simple questions help salespeople make sure the buyer gets it and is on board with moving forward.

7. Move the Sale Forward: Using questions in the right way helps keep the selling process moving smoothly from start to finish, from figuring out needs to solving them and beyond.

To help salespeople reach all these goals at once, different systems have been made to guide them in asking the right questions. Two big ones are SPIN and ADAPT. They both follow a logical order, like a funnel, starting with easy, general questions. Then, they move on to more specific questions that help figure out what the buyer needs and push the selling process forward, leading to showing off the solution's features, advantages, and benefits.

SPIN Questioning System

The SPIN system sorts questions into four types to figure out what's going on with a buyer and what problems they're dealing with. It helps the buyer see how those problems affect them and what can be done to fix them. SPIN stands for situation questions, problem questions, implication questions, and need-payoff questions.

1. Situation Questions: These ask for basic info about the buyer's current situation. They're asked early in the sales call to help salespeople understand the buyer's needs better. Examples include "Who are your current suppliers?" and "Do you buy or lease?" It's important not to ask too many of these questions, as they can make the buyer bored or annoyed.

2. Problem Questions: These come after situation questions and dig deeper into specific issues or problems the buyer is facing. They help identify areas where the salesperson's product or service could help. Examples include "How important is this part for your production?" and "What

problems have you had with your current suppliers?" Many salespeople don't ask enough of these questions.

3. Implication Questions: These follow up on the information from problem questions. They help the buyer see the consequences of not solving their problems, which can motivate them to find a solution. Examples include "How does this affect your profits?" and "What happens when your supplier is late?" Even experienced salespeople often struggle to use these effectively.

4. Need-Payoff Questions: These questions focus on the benefits of solving the problems identified earlier. They help the buyer see the positive outcomes of choosing the salesperson's solution.

The ADAPT questioning system follows a logical sequence of questions, starting with broad and general questions to understand the buyer's situation. Once the salesperson learns more, they ask more detailed questions to find out about the buyer's needs and expectations. Then, they use this information to have a collaborative discussion that gets the buyer motivated to solve their problem and see the value in the solution. In the final phase, the salesperson gets the buyer's commitment to learn more about the solution and allows them to move forward with presenting and demonstrating the product. ADAPT stands for assessment questions, discovery questions, activation questions, projection questions, and transition questions, which represent what the salesperson should do at each stage.

Assessment Questions: These are the first questions asked, and they aim to gather basic information about the buyer's situation without making them feel pressured. They help kickstart the conversation and provide a foundation for further exploration.

Discovery Questions

At a closer level, discovery questions need to dig deeper and ask for more details to fully understand the buyer's problems. They aim to uncover facts as well as how the buyer sees things,

their feelings, and what they think about their needs, wants, and dissatisfactions related to the product, delivery, budget, and service levels they're looking for. The aim is to find out what the salesperson's offering can do to solve the buyer's needs and dissatisfactions.

Projection Questions.

Building on activation questions, projection questions help the buyer imagine what life would be like without the problems that were identified earlier. These questions have a few good outcomes. First, they shift the focus from problems and their consequences to the positive side—the benefits of solving those problems. What seemed like costs before are now seen as benefits for the buyer and their organization—the reward for taking action and investing in a solution. Second—and just as important—this benefit helps the buyer see the real value of solving the problem. It shows them the positive outcome they'll get and helps them understand what the solution is really worth—what they'd be willing to pay for it.

Transition Questions

Transition questions help make the shift from finding out the buyer's needs to showing them how the proposed solution can help. These questions make sure the buyer is ready to find a solution and allows the salesperson to move on with the selling process.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION: LISTENING

Listening is just as important as asking good questions. Asking the customer for information won't help if the salesperson doesn't listen carefully. Studies show that many salespeople struggle with listening. Not being good at listening is a big reason why some salespeople don't do well. To really understand what the customer needs, and to build a good relationship with them, salespeople have to be able to listen well and understand not just what was said, but what it meant.

Using Different Types of Listening

Communication research divides listening into two main types: social and serious. Social listening is the casual kind you do in everyday situations, like chatting with friends or listening to music. It doesn't need much focus or thinking to understand the messages. Serious listening, on the other hand, is when you really need to pay attention and understand what's being said. It's also called active listening because it requires a lot of focus and thinking to understand and respond to messages. You have to cut through distractions and choose which messages are important, then understand them and respond appropriately.

Active Listening

Active listening in sales means actively paying attention, understanding, and responding to what customers say and how they say it, both verbally and nonverbally. This definition is helpful for those who want to get better at active listening. It highlights the importance of understanding both spoken words and body language to fully understand what's being communicated. It also follows a common model of listening. To be good at active listening, you need to do each of these four steps in the right order and successfully.

Sensing

Listening involves more than just hearing; it also includes paying attention and understanding. In active listening, the first steps are sensing (hearing and seeing) and receiving (paying attention to) both the spoken and nonverbal parts of the message. Sensing takes practice and shouldn't be assumed. Studies show that many people only listen at about 25 percent of their ability. Think about it: how often do you have to ask someone to repeat themselves, or assume you know what they're going to say before they finish? Concentrating and paying attention better can improve how well you sense things. Taking notes, making eye contact, and not interrupting can help. Let the speaker finish what they're saying, as it helps you focus and encourages them to give more information.

Interpreting

Interpreting means figuring out what the sender is trying to say. It's not just about the words they use, but also about their experiences, knowledge, and attitudes. Don't rush to judge the message until the sender is done talking. Pay attention to both what they say and how they say it, and notice if there are any differences between the two. Also, consider what you know about the sender and their past statements to understand their message better.

Evaluating

Active listening involves deciding whether you agree with what the sender is saying. During the interpretation stage, you need to figure out what's factual and what's based on opinion or emotion. Sometimes, people make up their minds about a message before hearing it all, especially if they disagree with something. This can stop communication in its tracks. You can improve your ability to evaluate messages by focusing better and carefully considering the whole message. Summarizing the main points as if you were going to tell someone else can also help. Instead of judging the message right away, try to find parts that interest you, which can make evaluating easier.

Responding

Responding is essential for active listening to work well. In a conversation where both sides are involved, the listener needs to respond to the speaker. Responses let the other person know you're paying attention, encourage them to share more, and can even help you start talking next. There are different ways to respond. Nodding or smiling can show you got the message. Restating or putting the message in your own words shows you're interested and understand. Asking questions can get more information or clear things up.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION: GIVING INFORMATION

Verbal information includes facts, opinions, and attitudes expressed using words, pictures, or numbers. However, the same words or symbols can mean different things to different people. This can happen because of different industries, cultures, or types of training or work experience.

Understanding the Superiority of Pictures over Words

Research in cognitive psychology shows that people tend to remember pictures better than words. This means that using pictures helps people understand and remember things more easily compared to just using words or symbols. This has important implications for selling things effectively.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal behaviors have been important in communication for a long time. Even back in 1605, Francis Bacon talked about the messages conveyed by hand signals. While verbal communication focuses on the actual words used, nonverbal communication is about how the message is delivered. It includes both conscious and unconscious reactions, movements, and sounds people make along with the words they use. This includes things like eye movements, facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, and voice tone. Nonverbal cues can carry a lot of meaning, sometimes even more than the words themselves. Research shows that successful salespeople are better at picking up on these cues than less successful ones. In fact, more than half of the meaning in communication comes from nonverbal behavior. So, it's really important for salespeople to pay attention to these cues, along with what's being said. They should also try to understand the thoughts and feelings that aren't expressed directly in words.

Facial Expressions

The different parts of the face are really important in showing nonverbal messages during communication. For example, when someone is uncertain or disagrees, they might frown, purse

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their lips, or squint their eyes. Suspicion and anger often make the jaw tense. Smiling usually shows agreement and interest, while biting your lip can mean you're unsure about something. Raised eyebrows can show surprise and often happen when someone is thinking things over.

Eye Movements

In North America and Western Europe, avoiding eye contact usually sends a negative message and can make people think you're being dishonest. On the other hand, making more eye contact shows honesty and confidence. When the person sending the message makes more eye contact, it usually means they're interested and paying attention. But if someone stares without looking away or blinking, it can feel threatening or like they're trying to assert power. If someone has a blank stare or looks away during a conversation, it can show they're not interested and may be bored.

Placement and Movements of Hands, Arms, Head, and Legs

Smooth and slow movements show that someone is calm and confident, but quick and jerky movements indicate nervousness and stress. When someone keeps their arms and legs uncrossed, it shows they're open, confident, and willing to cooperate. But crossing arms and legs can make the other person feel shut out and express disagreement or defensiveness. More movement of the head and limbs can mean the tension is rising, as well as tightly clasping hands or fists. Putting a hand on the chin or tilting the head suggests someone is evaluating things more, while nodding shows they agree. When someone starts drumming their fingers or tapping their foot, it can mean they're getting impatient. Playing with hair or rubbing the back of the neck shows they're getting more nervous and worried.

Body Posture and Orientation

Moving around and shifting from side to side usually shows nervousness and worry. Leaning forward or sitting on the edge of a chair usually means someone is getting more interested and feels positive about what's being talked about. But leaning away can mean they're not interested,

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bored, or even don't trust what's being said. Leaning back with both hands behind the head might make someone seem arrogant or like they think they're better than others. Standing up really straight can make someone seem inflexible or defensive, while slouching suggests they're not interested in the topic. Sitting backward on a chair or on the edge of a table or chair arm can show power and superiority.

Proxemics

Proxemics is about how much personal space people like to have between themselves and others, and it's an important part of nonverbal communication. The distance someone keeps from others sends a message and can affect how successful a sales interaction is. If a salesperson gets too close to a customer who wants more space, the customer might feel like the salesperson is trying to manipulate or intimidate them. But if a salesperson stays too far away, they might seem too formal, distant, or even nervous. Different cultures and places have different ideas about how much personal space is comfortable.

Variations in Voice Characteristics

Nonverbal aspects of speaking, like how fast someone talks, how long they pause, the pitch of their voice, and how loud they speak, are connected to how well they communicate and how successful they are in selling.

Speaking Rates and Pause Duration

Usually, people prefer speakers who talk at a faster pace within normal limits. Despite the belief that fast-talking salespeople seem pushy, speaking faster and having shorter pauses actually make someone seem more intelligent, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. On the other hand, slower speakers are often seen as less skilled and less friendly. However, speaking too fast or too irregularly can make it harder to understand the whole message. Changing the pace of speech also helps keep people interested.

Pitch or Frequency

The tone of someone's voice tells a lot to the listener. Changing the pitch and frequency while speaking helps keep the listener interested and emphasizes certain parts of what's being said. When the pitch goes up during a message, it usually means there's a question or some uncertainty. On the other hand, when it goes down, it usually means a statement is being made or the message is finishing. In general, voices that are high-pitched are seen as less honest, less powerful, and more nervous. Lower-pitched voices, however, are seen as more convincing and honest, and they can help with selling.

Intensity and Loudness

Loud voices are usually linked to dominance, power, and aggression, while soft voices often show submission and uncertainty. But what matters most in communication is how the volume changes. Having different levels of loudness helps adjust to different situations and places. Changing the volume also makes the listener pay more attention and highlights important parts of the message.

Using Nonverbal Clusters

Nonverbal clusters are groups of related expressions, gestures, and movements. Just like one word might not fully explain what someone means, one gesture or movement alone might not show the true message. It's better to look at groups of nonverbal cues together to understand what someone really means. When different behaviors and gestures go together, they give a clearer message that salespeople should pay attention to.

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Examination

1. What distinguishes trust-based selling from traditional selling methods?
 - a) The focus on building relationships and understanding customer needs
 - b) The use of aggressive tactics to push products onto customers
 - c) Relying solely on verbal communication without listening to customers
 - d) Ignoring customer feedback and preferences during the sales process

2. Why is asking purposeful questions important in sales communication?
 - a) To overwhelm the customer with information
 - b) To gather detailed information about the customer's needs and expectations
 - c) To avoid engaging in meaningful conversation with the customer
 - d) To confuse the customer and manipulate their decision-making process

3. How do open-end questions differ from closed-end questions in sales communication?
 - a) Open-end questions encourage customers to provide detailed responses, while closed-end questions elicit short answers.
 - b) Open-end questions are used to conclude sales conversations, while closed-end questions are used to initiate them.
 - c) Open-end questions focus on persuading customers, while closed-end questions focus on gathering information.
 - d) Open-end questions are only used in face-to-face interactions, while closed-end questions are used in written communication.

4. What role do probing questions play in sales communication?
 - a) They aim to gather basic information about the customer's situation.
 - b) They help uncover specific details and clarify the customer's needs.
 - c) They are used to transition the conversation to a different topic.

d) They encourage the customer to make a purchase decision quickly.

5. How can reactive questions contribute to effective sales communication?

- a) By providing basic information about the customer's situation
- b) By encouraging the customer to share their feelings and opinions
- c) By following up on previous statements and keeping the conversation flowing
- d) By directing the conversation towards the salesperson's agenda

6. What distinguishes active listening from passive listening?

- a) Active listening requires focused attention and understanding, while passive listening involves ignoring the speaker's message.
- b) Active listening involves interrupting the speaker to express one's own opinions, while passive listening involves nodding without comprehension.
- c) Active listening focuses on verbal cues, while passive listening focuses on nonverbal cues.
- d) Active listening involves responding to the speaker's message, while passive listening involves avoiding engagement.

7. How do salespeople use questioning skills to move the sale forward?

- a) By bombarding the customer with irrelevant questions
- b) By asking questions that confuse the customer
- c) By asking questions that show genuine interest and understanding
- d) By avoiding asking questions altogether

8. What is the purpose of the SPIN questioning system in sales communication?

- a) To persuade customers to make impulsive purchases
- b) To gather basic information about the customer's preferences
- c) To uncover the customer's needs and problems
- d) To avoid engaging in meaningful conversations with customers

9. Why is varying the rate of speech important in sales communication?

- a) To overwhelm the customer with information
- b) To confuse the customer and manipulate their decision-making process
- c) To maintain the customer's interest and highlight important points
- d) To avoid interacting with the customer

10. How can nonverbal clusters contribute to understanding in sales communication?

- a) By providing conflicting messages that confuse the customer
- b) By distracting the customer from the verbal message
- c) By conveying a clearer and more comprehensive message
- d) By discouraging the customer from engaging in conversation

Key Answers

1.

- a) The focus on building relationships and understanding customer needs

2.

- b) To gather detailed information about the customer's needs and expectations

3.

a) Open-end questions encourage customers to provide detailed responses, while closed-end questions elicit short answers.

4.

- b) They help uncover specific details and clarify the customer's needs.

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5.

c) By following up on previous statements and keeping the conversation flowing

6.

d) Active listening involves responding to the speaker's message, while passive listening involves avoiding engagement.

7.

c) By asking questions that show genuine interest and understanding

8.

c) To uncover the customer's needs and problems

9.

c) To maintain the customer's interest and highlight important points

10

c) By conveying a clearer and more comprehensive message