

# Uncover Real Needs with Comparison Questioning

By Heather Baldwin

Sure, asking questions can lead to a sale. Asking the right questions, however, can win loyal business for years to come.

Salespeople add value only when they dig below surface-level answers. When they do it right, they may well discover that VPs who think their reps need sales training actually need to overhaul the way they hire. Or that a customer calling for a complex repair would be better off with a product upgrade.

“Just because a customer says, ‘Here’s my need,’ that doesn’t mean the customer is correct, but a lot of reps can’t get beyond that,” says Shelley Hall, principal and managing director of Catalytic Management, an organization that accelerates business growth through sales effectiveness and process improvement. Recently, Catalytic got a call from a company that wanted customer-service training for its employees. Upon discovering that the company’s owner had retired a few years ago, the Catalytic rep asked the following comparison questions:

- How does the staff currently behave, and how does that differ from two to three years ago?

- What service elements do you want improved, and why are they more important than other elements?
- How would you compare staff members’ behavior toward each other before and after the leadership change?

As it turned out, the regime change had resulted in widespread mistrust and animosity among managers and employees. This new culture was having a negative effect on customer service operations. With a better understanding of the problem and the issues behind it, Catalytic was able to provide a quality solution.

Comparison questions are key to getting customers to make connections about what’s working and what isn’t. “Clients have to make the discovery for themselves,” says Hall. “Our job is to help them do that by asking the right questions.”

Just remember that every sales solution is unique; what worked for one customer won’t necessarily work for the next. “You cannot come from a place of thinking you have all the answers,” Hall says. “[Don’t] make an assumption about one company just because the last five were a certain way.”



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