

The Secret To Closing More Sales

Never answer a question during first conversation

 By Mark Goulston



**SORRY WE'RE
CLOSED**

I have been described as a “people hacker”. When I asked a person who described me that way he told me, “You hack into what truly motivates or demotivates people to take action and create a safe path from where they are to where you’d like them to go.”

As a former clinical psychiatrist specializing in suicide intervention and FBI hostage negotiation trainer that meant having people give up either their imminent self-destructive or other-destructive impulses and come over to the side where they would do no harm.

In the world of sales it means having people open themselves up to being persuaded or sold by you, when they are by nature resistant to both. As the saying goes, “People like buying, but do not like being sold.”

What follows is the approach my team at I at the [Goulston Group](#) use in training lawyers, accountants, financial advisors and consultants on: “How to Turn a Conversation into Being Hired.” With little effort on your part, you’ll be able to tweak it into “How to Turn a Conversation into a Sale.”

The key to any sales conversation is it to cause your potential customer or client to start talking. And the key to a successful sales conversation is to keep them talking until *they* sell themselves on your product or service *and* you.

The mistake that most salespeople make is that they jump into the conversation too quickly and before their potential customer or client sells himself or herself. In other words, salespeople start trying to reel in a fish they have hooked too soon and cause the fish to unhook itself and then swim away.

When we train service providers our focus is to always have a first conversation lead to a second conversation that the potential customer or client enthusiastically initiates. That’s much more effective than giving them too much and having the next step be, “Let me think about it,” from them. Why? Because “let me think about it” means “Bye, bye. I’ve changed my mind.”

To start the conversation in the right direction, get into the habit of focusing on *what is* and *not* focusing on *what isn’t*.



And what is, is that they are on a call with you or exchanging an email or meeting with you *now*. You don't know anything more about them than that before they start talking or communicating more to you.

To get the ball rolling say, "As part of my education about people I'm always curious why they do something at the time they do it. In other words, I know what products, services and problems my company and I solve for people and I would like to know why from your point of view we're having this conversation and why we're having it now. So the reason from your point of view that you and I are speaking and you and I are speaking now is _____ (let them fill in the blank)."

The reason you use "fill in the blanks" vs. a question is that a person is less likely to go on the defensive and more likely to fill in a blank than answer a question. Questions trigger unconscious flashbacks of having been put on the spot and are adversarial – you vs. me -- by nature, whereas "fill in the blanks" invites them into a sentence with you. After they begin speaking notice four elements:

- **Hyperbole** – Where they use words such as "amazing!", "incredible!", "awful!", "horrendous!" etc.
- **Inflection** – Where the intensity and pitch of their voice goes way up or way down.
- **Adjectives** – Which are ways to embellish a noun.
- **Adverbs** – Which are ways to embellish a verb.

All of these four elements have an emotional charge on them and represent openings and your invitation to have the person go deeper and reveal more of their feelings (and tied to that, their motivation) to you.

After you have engaged them in a conversation long enough with their answering the "what?", "why?", "why now?" and "why you?" questions (or fill in the blank manner of asking) of speaking or communicating with you, there will be a point when they will ask you what you think.

Read my lips! NEVER, NEVER, NEVER answer such a first question?

Why? Because if you do, you will not differentiate yourself from your competition, who has been trained to ask similar questions and you will miss the opportunity to distinguish yourself.

Instead, employ what we refer to in my book, "Just Listen," as conversation deepeners. Three examples of those are:

- "Say more about (the amazing or awful, opportunity, disaster, etc.)"
- "Really?" – said in an inviting manner when they have responded to the "Say more..." prompt.
- "Hmmm..." – said (a la your psychotherapist) in a way that communicates, "Keep talking." "I'm interested," "No you're not making a fool out of yourself."

What you will notice by using such conversation deepeners is that the other person invests more of what they think and more importantly feel about things that they already have an emotional charge on. And the more they reveal about themselves into the conversation, the more invested they will be in what you have to say.

After continuing to uncover and surface deeper feelings they have, they are at sometime going to feel uncomfortable and will most likely ask you what you think.

They will be more interested in your answer, because they will then feel that they have revealed even more about themselves to you (and much more than they will have revealed to your competition).

And now, still don't answer their question.

Instead say, "I can tell you what I think, but instead I'd rather take this conversation to the ICU."

At which point they're going to look at you like you're crazy and say, "ICU? What?"

To which you respond, "Yes I'd like to focus on what we've talked about that is most Important, Critical and Urgent to you. Important is sometime in the next year; Critical is sometime in the next few months; Urgent is today or this week. Now I can guess what those are, but instead of my guessing, please tell me what they are from your point of view."

The purpose of this is that you have opened them up with conversation deepeners and now you want to refocus them on their priorities and the one that is most relevant to you is what they view as "Urgent."

After they reveal what that is, have them go deeper with, "Say more about what makes that urgent," and then the other conversation deepeners, "Really?" and "Hmmm..."

By then they will be salivating to find out what you have to say because they've revealed so much about deeper concerns and now they've shared something that is urgent for them. Even then, don't answer their questions.

Instead say, "What I can say is that we've successfully handled that with other customers and clients who I'm happy to offer up as references (so you better have such references or start doing such a great job that you will have them), but you have really shared much with me, especially what is important, critical and urgent for you. And rather than giving you a very good answer, I want to check on a number of things so that I can give you my best answer rather than calling you over and over again with annoying, 'And another thing' messages.

The question is how urgent is it for you to get my best answer and whether you want me to put out the effort in finding it. In the meantime I'm happy to give you some references to contact to check me and my company out (BTW, they will rarely check the references at this stage)."

Hopefully, they will be highly motivated and tell you it's highly urgent.

At that point respond with another fill in the blanks of: "So the time when you'd like to hear back from me regarding this is _____."

In all likelihood they will fill in the blank with a time for your follow up at which you can end with, "I think I can get you my best answer by then, how do you suggest we go about scheduling it?"

What we have discovered is that there are as many skills in learning to be a good questioner and listener as there are in being a good talker/seller.

In the end, it matters less what you tell people than what you enable them to tell you that is important, critical and urgent to them. **SSE**



Mark Goulston, M.D., is CEO and Founder of Goulston Group. Mark is a psychiatrist, former FBI Hostage Negotiation Trainer and "People Hacker". He is the author of "[Just Listen](#)". Email mark@goulstongroup.com Visit goulstongroup.com

Would like to Comment? Please Click Here.

