

Trust – the critical ingredient in every sale

How to ask questions that multiply your income

Michael Harrison

Imagine two people want to sell you the same item at the same price. Why will you choose one over the other?

When we survey the customers of our clients, often they answer, “it just felt right”. Successful businesspeople realise that ninety-five percent of buying decisions are made based on feelings – and justified using logic. What they don’t know is how to trigger their customer’s feelings so that they choose them over the competition.

The answer lies in building trust.

Consider the two axes on the illustration. One is tension and the other is trust.

Tension can come from initial wariness, uncertainty, or just the pressure to make a decision. Trust almost always follows the release of tension.

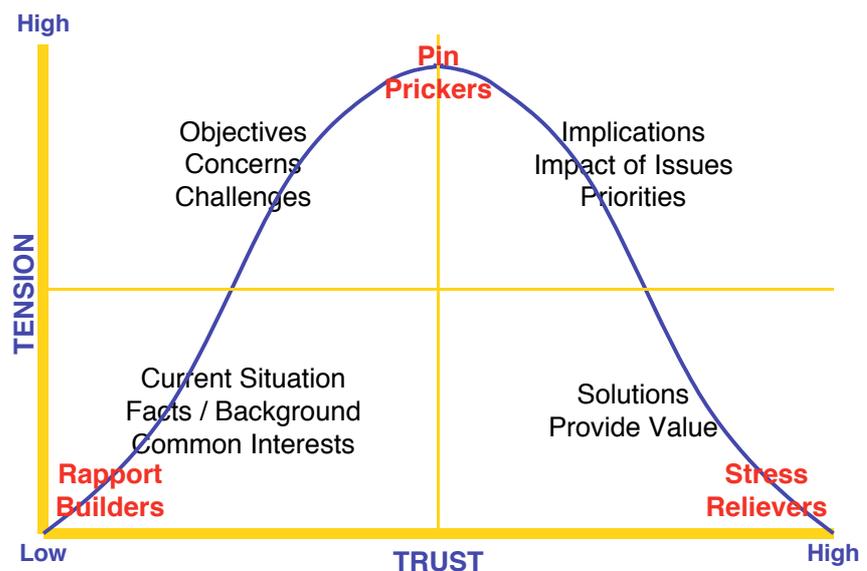
The key is to ask your customers the right questions in the right order; listen to their answers; demonstrate genuine concern about their issues; and illustrate how your product or service can provide the value they seek or relieve their anxiety.

Basically there are three types of questions that I have dubbed as:

- **Rapport Builders** – getting-to-know-you questions, also known as “icebreakers”.
- **Pin Prickers** – questions to delve beneath the surface to discover what a prospect really wants.
- **Stress Relievers** – confirm your product or service will provide the result your buyer wants.

Follow the sequence in the illustration and your customer will listen to his feelings, trust them and feel confident that that you will lead him and his business to success.

Most relationships start in a neutral position with low trust and low tension. This is why “**Rapport Builders**” are so essential.



Questions such as:

- How long have you been in this role? What did you do before? or
- How did you get started in this business?
- What do you do when you’re not working? How do you relax?
- What are your main responsibilities?
- What do you see as the main challenges facing your industry?

... give you background information about the prospect and show that you’re interested in what they have to say. They allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of their industry – whilst building rapport and trust in a low stress environment.

These are the most important questions because they create the foundation of your relationship.

“**Pin Prickers**” are questions that require a certain amount of rapport to exist before they can be posed. They are designed to get under a person’s skin and can sometimes be a little painful or confronting. These questions allow you to find out what a person really wants, why and how much they want it.

They also determine if there is a link from what a prospect wants to what you sell and, at the same time, force them to think beyond the obvious.

- How to improve their effectiveness
- How to decrease employee turnover
- How to increase customer loyalty

In my experience three excellent “Pin Prickers” are:

1. If you could significantly improve one aspect of your business in the next 30 days, what would it be?
2. What are the 2 or 3 critical success factors that your business must get right in order to succeed?
3. Which trends do you feel will have the most impact on your business in the next three years?

After you ask these it is important to explore the impact by asking something like:

- What is the follow-on effect of the issue/challenge you described?

Interestingly enough, businesspeople that ask insightful questions are considered to be more knowledgeable, caring and concerned than their competitors.

After going through the soul-searching that “Pin Prickers” require, the next questions are truly

“**Stress Relievers**”. Now you are easing tension while continuing to build trust.

Stress Relievers give you an opportunity to demonstrate how your product or service will provide the answers to your customer’s problems. You understand the background, you have a good sense of the issues and now you can address them.

It might be enough to just ask, “What, if anything, do you still need from me?”

Let’s face it, most people want similar things:

They say they want:	They hope to achieve:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved operational efficiency ▪ Lower staff turnover ▪ Higher customer loyalty ▪ A clear point of difference ▪ Better cross-selling ▪ Improved conversion rates ▪ Better market share ▪ The ability to deal with legislation and compliance issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Security ▪ More time ▪ Better health ▪ Higher profit ▪ Lower expenses ▪ Prestige ▪ Growth ▪ Success

When everything else is equal, the thing that makes the real difference is you. It’s not your product or service or even your company.

Well-organised, well-considered questions build trust that will sustain the relationship during the tension of getting to the heart of what is truly important to the customer – their objectives, concerns, challenges and implications.

Only when the prospect feels that you understand them and their business will they ever have that “feeling” that you will partner with them to achieve success.

Michael Harrison is a business strategist who specialises in maximising profit and minimising complexity.

A noted business speaker, author and consultant, Michael is the creator of the “Mini Guide to Business” series and the author of two books and numerous articles about business success and related topics.

This article offers an insight into his book “How to Ask Questions That Sell” available at www.strategies.com.au.

