

## **Socratic Selling: how to ask the questions that get the sale,**

**Kevin Daley, Irwin Professional Publishing**

**Socratic Method:** A method of teaching or discussion, as used by Socrates, in which one asks a series of easily answered questions that inevitably lead the answerer to a logical conclusion.

Respect the customer

Help the customer think

Help the customer make decisions.

End of chapter notes

### **Begin with a Socratic opener:**

Say you are prepared

*“Mr Jones, I’m prepared to talk about . . . . ., which we discussed on the phone.”*

Invite the customer to speak on the subject.

*“If you could give me your perspective on that . . . .”*

Offer an immediate benefit.

*“We can focus the meeting on what interests you.”*

Every customer has a perspective on a subject and is only too happy to share it. Ask.
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**The customer owns the past.**

**The customer has no stake in the future – until the past has been dealt with.**

**Help the customer tell the story.**

Use Socratic draw probes:

*“Tell me more about . . . .”*

*“Would you elaborate on . . . .”*

*“Give me an example of . . . . .”*

*“What else should I know about . . . .”*

*“What else would help me understand . . . .”*

Use Socratic access probes:

*“How does . . . . . fit the picture?”*

*“Talk to me about . . . . . your experience with . . . . .”*

*“How do you handle . . . . . ?”*

Believe that the sale is being made when the customer speaks about the need. Not one moment is wasted.
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**The clock runs faster on the customer.**

**Ask easily answered questions about urgency.**

*“Why now?”*

*“What makes this urgent?”*

*“Why is this important right now?”*

**Take advantage of the highly visible deadlines.**

Seasonal deadlines

Phase completion deadlines

**Watch for less visible deadlines**

Start-up deadlines

New Broom deadlines

Unspent budget deadlines

The customer's second need is a solution. The customer's first need is to get started on a solution.
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**Facts about the need determine the choice of product or service.**

**The customer's feelings determine the buying decision.**

**Ask easily answered questions about feelings.**

For irritants:

*“What bothers you most about this?”*

*“I sense you're frustrated by this . . .”*

*“How tough a position does this put you in?”*

For motivators:

*“How does this affect you?”*

*“I sense this means a lot to you.”*

*“Why is this important to you?”*

Sales are closed through what the customer feels.
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**The sharpest competitive edge is the one your competition neglect.**

The customer needs to know you understand.

Listening fosters lasting relationships.

Listening fosters unbeatable relationships.

**You haven't listened until you can show you have listened.**

Play back a summary of the facts.

If you don't get it right, the customer is happy to help you try again.

A playback draws fresh information

Play back the person.

Ask yourself, what is important to the customer?

If the customer has feelings about it, the person is involved.

**Ask easily answered questions:**

*“How does that sound?”*

*“Do I have it right?”*

*“Am I getting the picture?”*

*“Is that it?”*

When you play back what is important to the customer, you capture the person of the customer.

**Ask easily answered questions to elicit decisions:**

Lead in

Specific decision

*“If you were to go ahead with . . .*

*when would you . . . ?”*

*how many would you . . . ?”*

*where would you . . . ?”*

*what kind would you . . . ?”*

*and so on.*

**To reduce pressure, build fantasy components into the question.**

Use conditional words (If, were to, would)

Exclude *I* or *we*.

Exclude your brand name and your company name.

**Support the customer’s conditional decisions.**

Use brief playbacks

Make comments that show acceptance.

Events paint the picture of the past; decisions, the picture of the future.  
Responsibility begins in seeing the future.

**Make a “no surprises” proposal. Gather momentum with a summary:**

*“Let me summarise what I heard you say . . . “*

Facts that describe needs of opportunities.

Feelings connected to:

Time urgency

Irritants

Pressure motivators

Success motivators

Conditional decisions made by the customer.

**Get approval with an easily answered question:**

*“How does that sound?”*

**Make a recommendation. “I would like to make a recommendations based on what you’ve told me.”**

Tie the recommendation to benefits.

Choose evidence that fits the customer.

**Ask for agreement with an easily answered question:**

*“What’s your reaction?”*

Proposals that fit are ready for agreement.

**The customer’s question may introduce a topic of interest. Draw out the customer’s interest before attempting to answer in detail.**

Give a brief, general answer to the question.

Use an easily answered question to draw out more detail:

*“Why do you ask?”*

*“What are you interested in discussing?”*

*“Tell me more about . . .”*

Never miss a topic the customer wants to introduce.  
Never miss a chance to help the customer think.

**You don’t understand the objection you hear. To handle it Socratically, go behind the objection.**

Make the objection specific.

Probe for the concern behind the objection.

Play back the objection in a word or two.

Ask easily answered question.

*“Please tell me exactly what you mean.”*

*“Why do you ask that?”*

*“How did you arrive at that?”*

When you don’t know what the customer is talking about, you don’t know what you’re talking about.

**Know your value to the customer.**

You are a reliable resource.

The customer has invested time in you.

You offer a valuable product or service.

**Know all the objections before negotiating.**

Don’t give away what you can trade for.

Don’t get stuck with what you can’t give.

**Ask an easily answered “suppose question”:**

*“Suppose we were able to resolve this issue. I know it’s not resolved right now, but just suppose we could. Are there any other issues standing in the way of our doing business?”*

Never underestimate the impression you make upon the customer in a Socratic dialogue.

**The customer wants changes. Start by expanding the options.**

Make a get list  
Make a give list.

**Decline and explain.**

Decline the changes that take you beyond your stopping point. Explain your rationale for stopping: *"Let me explain why that's further than I can go."*

**Ask an easily answered question to introduce a counter offer:**

*"Would you like to discuss what I think might work?"*

**Make a get-give counter offer:**

*"If you (do this), then I will (do that)."*

Don't negotiate just to get the sale. Negotiate to upgrade the sale for yourself and the customer.
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**Help the customer make the buying decision.**

Regain the momentum by summarising.

Make a diary statement.

*"In order to do this for you, let's get out our diaries and schedule the next steps."*

Specify the next steps.

- Actions the customer offers to take.
- Actions the customer wants you to take.
- Actions you offer to take.
- Actions you want the customer to take.

Attach dates to all action steps.

Time is the recorder of responsibility. Close on a point in time.
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