



Sales Academy

Part five

Mr Kipling makes exceedingly good questions! So says Pro-Train4Results' [Paul Rowland](#).

We now move to the Build element of the ABC sales process of Attention, Build and Conclude created by Pro-Train4Results.

This is where you begin to build the relationship with the customer. To accomplish this we need to adopt and understand open and closed questioning techniques. How to listen to the customer and why it is beneficial to do so; then finally make sure you utilise your USP's, Fab's and UPB's! In summary, acquire/know/understand the customer's needs then develop and match these needs to your products and company's 'go to market proposition'.

Question then: how do we achieve involvement from anyone in a conversation? How do we create interest? How do we find out information about their company? (dramatic pause) Yes, you've got it – ask open questions not closed questions.

So what are open questions and what sort of response will they generate and what are the advantages of using them? Let us first confirm what they are with the help of Rudyard Kipling who in 1902 wrote in the 'Just So' stories: 'I keep six honest men,

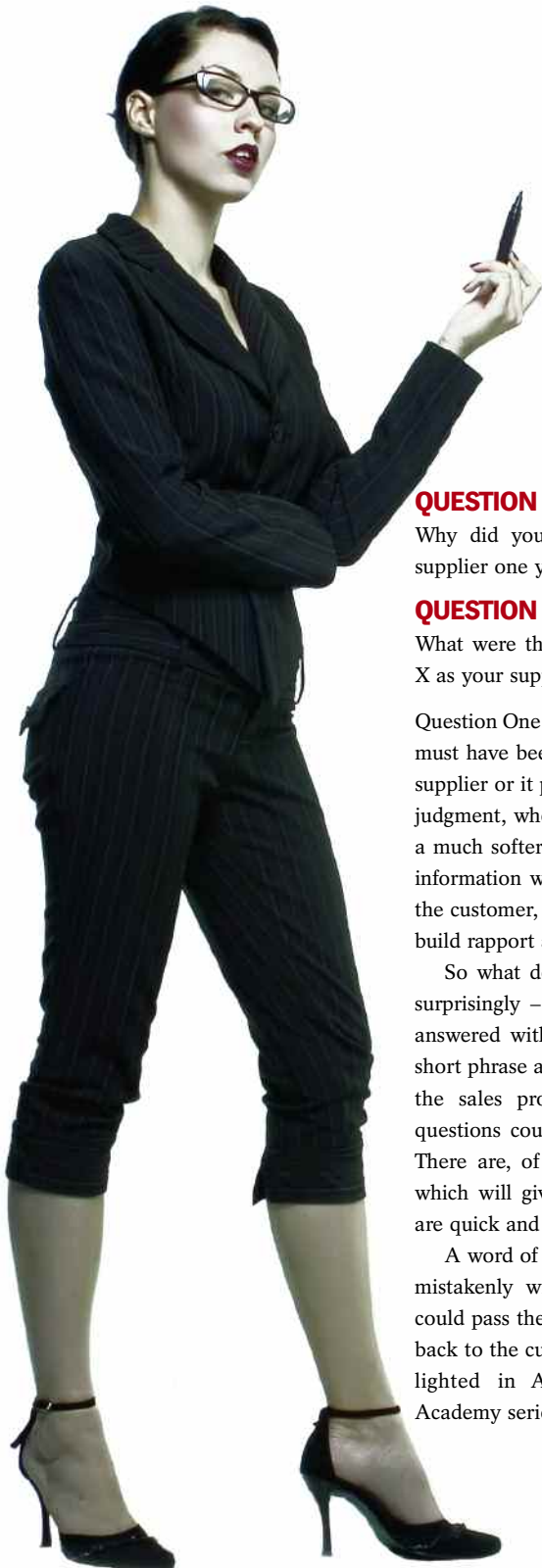
they taught me all I knew. Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'. Proof then that these guys stand the test of time!

The key benefit with open questions beginning with the words highlighted by Mr Kipling is that they ask the respondent to think and reflect on the question they have just been asked, and we are likely to receive a long answer.

Furthermore, they help us define the customer's needs, opinions/ feelings, clarify our offering to the customer and help us control the conversation rather than the customer. This is vital if we are to achieve our objectives of the call. Lastly, and one of the biggest areas of all, they help you build rapport with the customer. (See last month's issue for all the key benefits of this strategy).

Before we close the door on open questions I would like to point out the danger of the question 'Why?' 'Why?' you might well ask? Well, potentially it can be an aggressive, intrusive or offensive questioning technique and a word I use sparingly, if at all, with customers. To confirm this point, let me pose a question to a fictitious customer:





→ Open questions help us define the customer's needs, opinions/ feelings, clarify our offering to the customer and help us control the conversation

QUESTION ONE:

Why did you select X as your current supplier one year ago?

QUESTION TWO:

What were the main reasons in selecting X as your supplier?

Question One insinuates that the customer must have been crazy to select X as their supplier or it puts doubt in the customer's judgment, whereas the 'What' question is a much softer way of acquiring the same information without potentially upsetting the customer, with whom we are trying to build rapport and trust.

So what do closed questions do? Not surprisingly – the opposite! They can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase and are a vital component of the sales process. Examples of closed questions could be: did, are, is and will. There are, of course, many more, all of which will give you the facts and which are quick and easy to answer.

A word of warning though: if you lead mistakenly with a closed question, you could pass the control of the conversation back to the customer, something we highlighted in Article Two of the Sales Academy series.

Listening plays a pivotal link with questioning techniques and surprisingly is one of the hardest areas sales people struggle to perfect as many think it should be them that speak the most, not the customers (this notion has already been proved wrong in previous articles).

So why should we listen and how can we listen? Firstly, it helps you confirm what the customer wants. Secondly, when we listen to people they feel understood and cared about and, finally, it helps you control the conversation as you can then react to the response from the customer to your questions.

Some of the key elements associated with listening skills are: never to interrupt a customer when they are speaking, allow them to end their comment, respond at the right times based on the dialogue, make listening noises, (this is extremely important if you are speaking over the phone), never make assumptions or you will switch off and as a consequence not listen to what the customer is saying and, finally, listen with your eyes!

When you are face to face this is easy to accomplish however, this can also be achieved when you are on the phone. Don't believe me? Think about when we are focused on getting a point across on the phone; do we gaze around the room, slouch back in our chair? No, in the main, we focus on something with our eyes, which in turn enables us to respond and listen to what is being said to us. This focus will then transmit itself over the phone. ●

Next month we continue with the remaining components of the 'Build' section; until then and as always 'Attitude conquers everything.' Go out there and make it happen!

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