



askology:

mastery of engagement
through the use of questions
to drive impactful dialogue



PAUL KIRCH

THE POWER OF QUESTIONS
DRIVING SALES SUCCESS
THROUGH ASKOLOGY

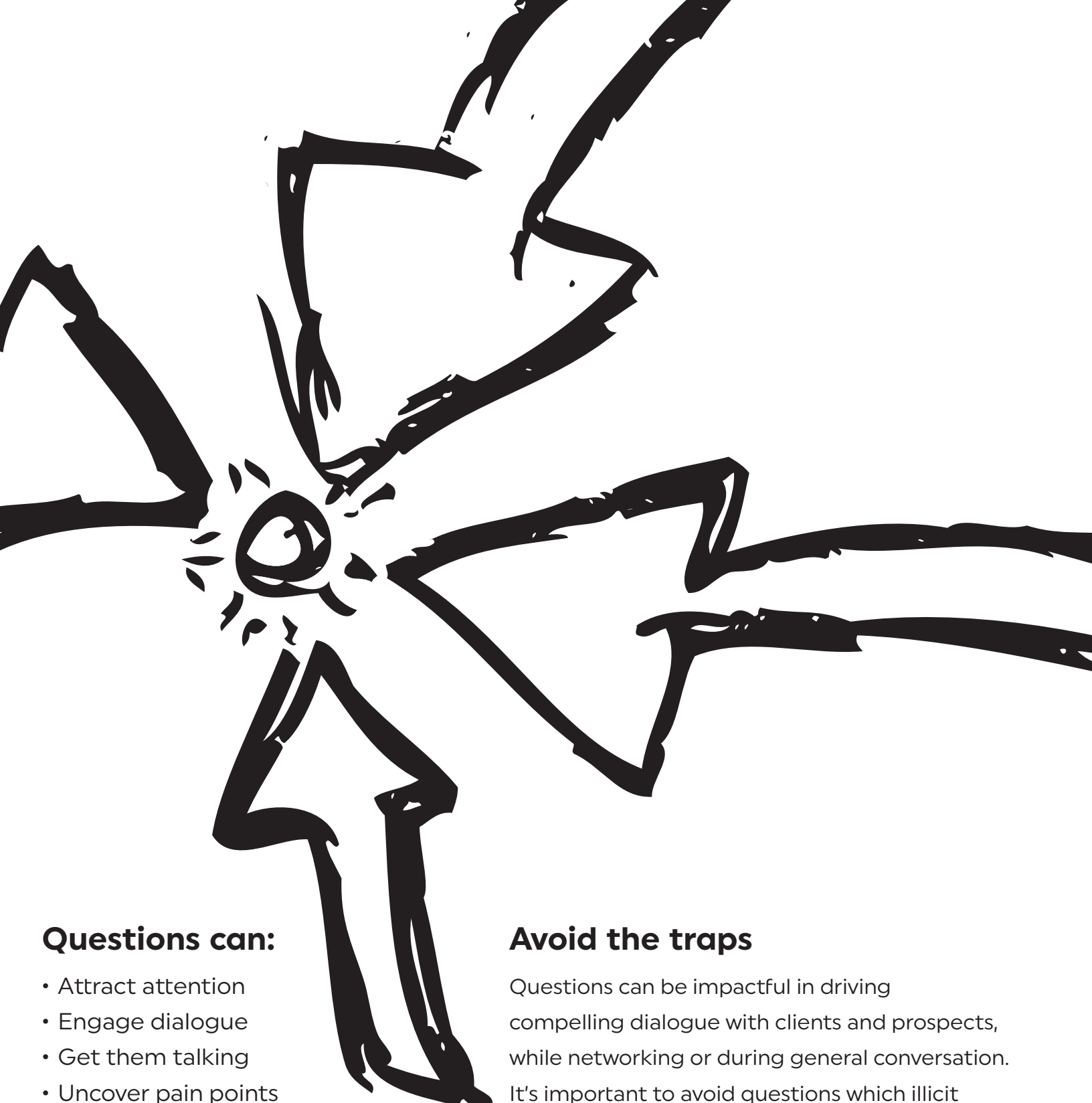


Business and sales today

Today's business world is more competitive than ever. That alone presents a challenge when attempting to build client relationships. It's just one of the many hurdles facing anyone interacting directly with customers and prospects. After all, sales dialogue that comes across like an obvious sales pitch often leads to alienation or irritation with today's sophisticated and more educated buyers. Instead, you need to focus on a message that helps you differentiate your offering from the competition to make an impact. How do you accomplish that in world full of "noise" and distractions, such as a mountain of email, social networking, text messaging, and marketing messages that seem to be distributed through a fire hose? Often,

we find limited opportunities to connect with our potential buyers, let alone being able to relay a message that matters to them. Spend a day cold calling and you'll see a shrinking response rate with most calls going to voice-mail, which are likely to not be returned. The telephone is still an incredible sales tool, but we need to take into account that people are less responsive than ever before.

What's the answer? To be effective today, you need to understand how to drive engagement. If you're doing all of the talking, you're selling.; but by leveraging questions, you can drive real engaging, impactful dialogue. Questions drive conversation and they are the secret to business success.



Questions can:

- Attract attention
- Engage dialogue
- Get them talking
- Uncover pain points
- Learn what makes them tick
- Build trust
- Drive loyalty
- Differentiate
- Control conversations
- Give you an edge

Avoid the traps

Questions can be impactful in driving compelling dialogue with clients and prospects, while networking or during general conversation. It's important to avoid questions which illicit a "yes/no" answer. These are considered "trap questions," since the response may prevent true engagement. For example, if you ask, "Are you happy with your current supplier?" and the person responds "yes", how are you going to respond? Avoid the traps.

Four question types that engage

Learn the secret to real client engagement by mastering four question types.

When driving engagement, there are four question types which can make the biggest impact. By focusing on these, you have an opportunity to master customer engagement by uncovering areas where you can provide value (through your offerings) and by revealing areas where your competition has fallen short. What is the customer missing that others have not been able to provide? Are those areas where you can fulfill needs? If not, can you help them in other ways? Perhaps, you can direct them to another resource; thus, showing you're not selfish in your approach. Asking questions can uncover answers you never thought you'd gain, and, in some cases you may not be prepared to respond or you may find that you don't offer what they really need. In the end, what you do with the information is up to you, but you're further ahead of most sales people by going down this path.

1. Leading Questions

Using leading questions requires you to be knowledgeable about the market or the client's business, but if you can master this question type, it can be very impactful. With these questions, you already know the answer but you are using them to try to get your customer thinking. Depending on the answer, you may be able to cross a huge barrier or it may allow you to ask more questions to get them really thinking about their current situation. **"How are your supplier's shipping delays impacting your production schedule?"**

2. Investigative

The more you know about potential buyers, the better you can be prepared to uncover their pain points with their other suppliers or business in general. Uncover those points and you're no longer selling. Instead, you're solving problems. That's where investigative questions can make a huge difference. Think in terms of vendors, budget, hurdles, needs, pain points, etc. **"What's your current marketing budget?"**

Drive engagement through involvement

When you meet with prospects, focus on getting them involved in the processes. Questions can spark dialogue that get them talking, but it can also help you relate on a personal level. Before the meeting starts, you can find ways to connect, helping them see that you're a person first and not simply someone there to "sell" them services or products.

Beyond questions, you can leverage other ways to get them involved in the process. If a client offers you something to drink or offers to help you set up for the meeting, accept it, as it helps make him/her a part of the process. Letting the client play a part builds an affinity prior to the meeting even beginning.

If you have an opportunity to ask for volunteers, you can pull your clients into the presentation or possibly a demonstration. Any opportunity to make the meeting interactive is key. After their participation, you can leverage a question such as, "How easy was that to operate?" or "What did you like best about that?" This drives mental triggers which help make the meeting memorable and impactful.

Questions can help drive interaction and every meeting should bring the prospect or client into the process. If you do, you'll stand out and be seen as unique and engaging. If you spend the entire time talking and pre-senting, you're likely to bore and dis-engage them.

Engage and win!

3. Empathy

Empathy questions drive real issues to the surface. These questions allow us to relate and spark real emotion driven responses. It's not manipulation, but rather it's connecting on a personal level. We're talking about business issues, but that doesn't take the personal equation out of it. Relate and win.

"How are the recent layoffs I heard about on the news impacting your workload?"

4. Instigating

This is an area where you must exercise caution, but where you can make the biggest impact. If you can find a hot button or uncover a recent issue the client had with one of your competitors, you can ask questions to bring the issue to the forefront and make a huge connection. However, this is successful only if you're prepared to address the issue from your company's perspective. What would you do differently? How would you be a resource for them?

There's nothing worse than going down the path of asking instigating questions and not being prepared to respond. **"Shouldn't your vendor have caught that mistake? How are they handling it?"**

Pitfalls of poor questions

The questions you ask can determine your effectiveness at engaging and driving real relationship building. Despite the power and potential impact, damage can be done by asking the wrong types of questions or by not doing your homework ahead of time. Simple steps can help you master discovery and engagement. Avoid these pitfalls to maximize your impact:

Trap questions

Questions which illicit a "yes/no" answer should be avoided.

Exception: If used strategically as a means of leading the conversation, these can be used effectively. However, you must be prepared with a follow up question or response.

Research answered

Questions which can be answered by simple research, such as viewing the client's website or a quick online search, should be avoided. This makes you appear unprepared or lazy in your approach.

Exception: If you simply begin your question by stating something similar to the following: "While I was researching your company, I noticed that you offer _____. I was hoping to gain a better understanding of _____." Even if it's something you could have learned through researching, you are able to follow up with almost any question without losing credibility.

Highly sensitive or personal

Some questions are simply off-limits. You may quickly see, by reaction, that you've crossed the line or gone down a path you should not have. Use good judgment and don't push these situations. Right or wrong, if they are offended, you need to soften it immediately through clarification (why you were asking) or by a simple apology or acknowledgement.

Exception: If there is a critical piece of information you're attempting to uncover and you believe you've crossed a line, look for another way to get at the information. You may even explain why you want to get at that information. If it still meets resistance, it's time to move on and look for an answer in another way.



Be a resource

The greatest lesson I received during my tenure as an outside sales executive was to be seen as a resource. This may occur in different ways, but if you can have your clients see you as someone they can approach when it comes to problem solving, industry information, or any various other reasons beyond just the products you sell, you have crossed an exciting barrier most sales people face.

Sharing insights, offering ideas for them or their business, offering assistance, helping them network or even sending them business, are just a few ways in which you can start to become viewed as a resource. In addition, the questions you ask may help you stand out. If you ask a question that none of your competitors have asked, and if it makes them stop and think in a different way than they have in the past, you may stand out as someone who is more consultative and valuable to them.

By preparing for every meeting, and by learning about their business in advance, you can prepare questions which may just help you stand out. Combine that with your other actions and you may be seen as a valuable resource. **That's real power!**

The questions you ask may define you in the eyes of a prospect. How are you being defined?

Leading to lies

Questions which open up an opportunity for the person responding to answer with a lie or a misleading response are dangerous, since we often make decisions or take action based upon the answers we receive. "Are you the decision maker?" is a question which often receives a "yes" response, but that answer isn't always a true representation. Have you ever talked with someone who claimed to be the decision maker, but when it was time for him/her to decide, the response turned into, "Let me go back to my team and discuss this with them." Beware of questions which can lead to lies.

Exception: If you believe you've uncovered a lie or a misleading response, it may provide you great insight. Is this person unethical? Are you not making the impact you believed you were? If you feel the relationship is strong, does the answer put his/her real view of you in perspective? Pay very close attention to the responses and use your best judgment how to proceed with that information.

Taking action

Prepare a list

Develop lists of questions which can uncover issues or drive dialogue. Leverage the four types of questions defined within this document to start on this process. Build a list of 15-20 primary questions, along with a list of equal size, with "follow-up" questions.

Practice using questions

Through practice, either by yourself or with team role playing, you will discover that it becomes a natural process to start implementing questions into every conversation. Questions, if used properly, can get prospects and clients talking. Talking drives engagement and creates a mental trigger which puts them in a buying mindset versus you trying to force a selling one.

Recording and review

A powerful technique for self-evaluation and improvement is to record yourself as you make calls or during your practice sessions. Be self-critical and self-analytical to uncover areas that are working or those that have room for improvement.

Review and modification

As you refine your ability to ask questions, be sure to review your lists and always strive to improve the level of engagement you're driving during your prospect and client calls or meetings.

Research and relate

The questions you ask may help define you in the eyes of your customers and prospects. It's important, however, to strive to be seen as valuable, to be seen as a resource. Avoid asking lazy questions, especially ones which could be answered through simple research. Your time is valuable, but so is theirs. By wasting their time, you're also wasting yours. Research and then relate. This is a key to relationship building and trust development.





The power of listening

Leading, investigative, empathy and instigating are four question types which can help you redefine the way you connect and engage with prospects and clients. It's critical to avoid the desire to do all of the talking.

The desire to get our point across can impede on our ability to relate and gain trust. When you ask questions, you must also learn to listen. Do not get so fixated on the next question or next point you want to make, that you forget to listen for the answer they give. By listening, you can uncover obstacles or issues, which may be the turning point you were looking for. As we say at ActusMR, "Shut up and sell."

Ask, listen, engage and win!



PAUL KIRCH

"If you say it, it means something. If they say it, it means everything! Engaging your prospects and clients through questions can help you take your business to all new heights."

PAUL KIRCH, CO-FOUNDER, CEO CROSSING

CEOCROSSING

214.295.6111

PAUL@PAULKIRCH.COM

WWW.PAULKIRCH.COM