

April 2007: Closed Versus Open-ended Questions

Closed Versus Open-ended Questions

We have all been trained to ask open-ended questions, those that make the client speak more and unable to just say yes or no. But there are times when a closed-ended question can and will help you and the client achieve a mutual understanding. The fact is that a combination of open and closed questions during the interview will build trust and rapport.

So how and when should we ask the closed-ended questions?

Start Closed Questions With Verbs

Closed-ended questions allow you to get definite answers and move toward closing the sale. Closed-ended questions start with verbs, such as: 'are', 'will', 'is', 'have', 'did', and even contractions such as 'aren't', 'didn't', and 'won't'. This is often called a convergent question. It brings conversation gradually to a convergence on a single point or decision. It is answered with a yes or a no. You use this question when you want to begin narrowing the conversation and to get specific answers that lead you to a conclusion or a commitment.

Solicit More Specific Answers

You can use closed-ended questions to get more specific answers. "Will you be making a decision within the next two months?" "Are you considering changing your suppliers for this product?" "Is this the sort of thing you are looking for?"

Ask Them To Take A Position

A closed-ended question forces the prospect to take a position. "Do you like what I've shown you?" "Does this make

sense to you, so far?" "Would you like to get started on this right away?" You use this type of question when you want to get clear answers and bring the sales conversation to a close.

Remember, clients want you to be in control, show professionalism, lead by example and guide them into making a right decision. An interview with no closing questions is just a friendly chat and wasted time for you and the client.

When A "No" Means A "Yes"

The third type of question is a variation on the first two and is called the 'negative answer' question. This is when a no means a yes to your proposition. "Are you happy with your existing supplier?" If the client says no it means that they are interested in considering a new supplier. "Are you getting the kind of results that you expected?" If the client says no, it means that the client is open to considering your product or service as an alternative.

Don't leave your closing questions until the end and then ask the client "what do you think?" It is far better to ask closing questions throughout the interview and get small commitments of agreement or disagreement. This will enable you to summarize and confirm facts with the client and also get a commitment towards him or her doing business with you.

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Testimonials

I found the coaching sessions, precise and informative, very impressed

- Liesi Fimmano

Loads of good information, I wish I had coaching 10 years ago

- Linda Livingston

It was all extremely relevant to my business

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Very worthwhile – relevant marketing ideas

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