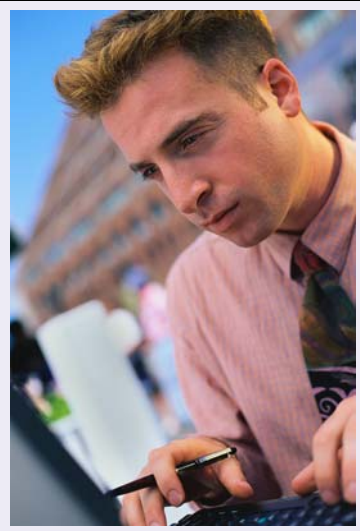


## Conversation or Inquisition?



We often fail to realize the true importance of spending little, but critical time, to plan our sales call. Yet business executives are intolerant of salespeople who waste their time. They want you to be prepared and have demonstrated an investment in understanding their business. Trite questions like, “What keeps you up at night?” or “What’s your biggest problem?” are annoying.

An executive presenting at a client’s sales kick-off meeting said, “Good questions require work. Read the Web, research the client, check for press releases on their company and their competitors, invest in understanding their industry. Make your questions topical and specific so you have a conversation versus an inquisition.”

### Fundamentals for Successful Sales Calls

Customize	Frame	Listen	Communicate	Follow Up
Demonstrate your understanding of the executive’s responsibility. The questions you ask will help you discover more about your customer and their business. They also demonstrate your level of credibility and willingness to invest time and energy to help your customer and their business grow and prosper.	Study your customer and their current situation carefully and put your questions into their context. For example: “I read recently that your competitor launched an initiative to improve their customers’ experience in working with them.  What are your customers saying you should improve?”	Remember, you are trying to get your customer to share their challenges. It is your job to listen intently and glean important information for your selling efforts.	Summarize and reinforce key concepts and mutual commitments reached during the meeting.  Communicate information you learn during your call with your team members and others who need to know. Knowledge can be the gateway to success.	Follow up with your customer on outstanding issues and promises. Your dedication and attention to matters that are important will help show that you and your company care about their success.

### Invest in a Call Plan

The simple process of planning your call will keep you and your team on track during customer encounters. It will be well worth the 5- to 10-minute investment of time, as it will result in more productive calls for you and your team.

- **Determine your primary objectives.** What objectives, if met, would make this call an extraordinary use of your time and your customer’s time? Every objective must have demonstrable value.
- **Secondary (back-up) Objectives.** Be prepared to be more successful. Should you meet your primary objectives, take advantage of the opportunity to learn more.
- **Gifts (value deliverables).** Every time you make an important customer call, bring gifts. These are not gifts that necessarily have monetary value, but rather are of high value to the recipient and reflect thoughtfulness on your part. Business information, problem-solving, perspectives, and ideas—even just listening. This best practice will differentiate you from every other salesperson calling on this executive.



A strategy for  
each sales call will  
differentiate you  
from your competition.

**ABOUT CPS.** Critical Path Strategies helps clients improve the effectiveness of their sales organization. Our portfolio of services addresses the strategic, organizational, and relationship issues that impact selling performance. Our powerful processes enable clients to transform their sales culture, enhance their competitive position, and accomplish strategic business initiatives. Our clients—emerging companies and members of the Fortune 500 alike—typically measure 100 to 500 times their CPS investment in revenue growth.



- **Good Questions.** When do you think of the best questions to ask? Too often, it is when you are driving away, or when your team asks, “Did you ask her ....?” Spend some time understanding what you and your team need to know from this customer. Develop four or five good questions that you will ask during the sales call. Remember, the quality of your knowledge is based on the quality of your questions.
- **Openings.** Who is going to open this call and how? Most people start here...and end here. Get the anxiety out of the room quickly. A simple, good start is, “How much time do you have for this call?” Plan on introducing the agenda or objectives for the sales call. Some customer styles want to take charge—give them the reins. Some prefer to have you drive the agenda. Regardless, hit the bulls-eye for *their* needs. Practice the Platinum Rule “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

Now that you’ve developed your call plan, send it to your customer ahead of time. Prepare your customer for your visit, be it in person or on the phone. Show respect for their time by being clear about what you want to achieve and let them add to the agenda or invite others to attend.

The time that you spend in front of your customers is extremely valuable and more and more difficult to get. Often they are overwhelmed and have multiple agendas and priorities they are trying to balance. When you get the opportunity, maximize it.

A strategy for each sales call will differentiate you from your competition, bring more value to your customer, improve your odds of subsequent access, and ensure that you are efficient and effective each time you ask for their time.

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