

Questioning Cheatsheet

SPECIAL BONUS FOR READERS OF ANTONIO GARRIDO'S *ASKING QUESTIONS THE SANDLER WAY: AN OVERVIEW OF 125 GREAT SANDLER QUESTIONS*

In using this tool, please remember that you're a business consultant, a trusted advisor: behave like one. That means asking smart questions, then asking more smart questions, and then even more smart questions until you fully understand the prospect's situation and what he *needs* in order to close the gap between where he is and where he wants to be.

A vendor answers dumb questions and then interrogates. A trusted advisor asks smart ones and *interviews*.

Here is a list of 125 classic Sandler® questions – five questions in 25 sales categories/situations – that you can use to get your creative juices flowing. The list below doesn't follow any particular pattern, nor are the questions intended to be asked in the sequence shown.

Use what follows with discretion. Bear in mind that it is *not* a checklist. Write down your favorite ten to fifteen questions and practice them so you can feel comfortable using them when you want to take charge of the sales interview (or when you hear crickets).

Nurture, nurture, and then nurture some more. Get your tonality right.

When making a cold call...

- Would it be OK to take 30 seconds to tell you why I called, and then you can decide whether it makes sense to continue? Are you comfortable with that promise?
- What have I said so far that sounded interesting?
- Other than you, who should I speak to?
- I'm going to give myself a note to call you again in _____. Is that OK? What should I do if I can't get ahold of you at that time?
- This is a cold call; shall I hang up first, or you?

For building rapport...

- Thanks for inviting me over today. Since we spoke on the phone, has anything changed?
- Do we still have [45 minutes] to try to understand whether or not we might be a good fit?
- Will you be comfortable with me asking you lots of questions about [insert four or five really tough, strategic question topics]? You can ask me anything, too, of course; is that fair?
- Help me to see the world through your eyes—what key things can you tell me about your business to help me get a better feel for it?
- When we get to the end of the meeting, if we're both happy to move on to the next stage, and I have no idea what that might look like yet, let's agree to scope it out and set a date in both of our calendars. That way we can make sure we stay on target. Does that make sense?

To start the ball rolling...

- So why have you invited me over today, and how are you hoping I might be able to help?
- Most of our new clients tell us that they've never bought this kind of thing before. Would it make sense for me to tell you a little bit about our organization and how we do things, and then you can tell me about yours? Are you comfortable with that?
- When we spoke, you mentioned that _____ is an issue for you. How long have you been thinking about/dealing with that?
- Most of our time is spent helping businesses like yours. Can you tell me a little bit about how you go about dealing with _____ at the moment?
- Would it make sense to start by telling me the single thing that gives you the most concern about _____ right now?

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Near the beginning...

- What were you hoping that I could do for you?
- When did you first decide that you should look into _____?
- If you were to imagine just one or two key things that you didn't like about your current solution or provider, what would they be?
- How would you rate things with _____ at the moment from 1-DISASTER to 10-PERFECT?
[Whatever the answer, you say, "OK, why?"]
- If I didn't think that I could help you, would you be OK if I told you so? And will you be OK extending the same courtesy to me if you ever feel that I'm not the right fit for your needs?

Understanding the pain...

- How serious would you say the problem is right now, today?
- What's the real, real, real problem?
- Have you ever considered giving up on solving this issue?
- If the situation didn't improve, or even got worse, how concerned do you imagine you or the business would be?
- What do you think this issue has cost the business over, say, the last six months? [Or whatever the appropriate timeframe is.]

To test understanding, and to dig deeper...

- I don't suppose you could give me a good example, could you?
- Just tell me a little bit more about it, can you?
- What do others in the department/company/office say about this issue?
- What surprises or upsets you most about this issue?
- Would it be fair to say that this issue is very difficult to objectively measure?

Near the middle of the sale...

- Where do you see the biggest need for improvement?
- I don't suppose you've given much thought to what performance standards you will be using to measure success in this issue, have you?
- What few things do you imagine would prevent you from improving your current issue?
- What thought have you given to actually implementing a different solution?
- Let me take a moment to summarize what I think I've heard so far, and you can tell me if I'm on the right page. Does that sound fair?

When trying to understand the budget...

- Typically, when we get to this stage, our clients tell us that they have no money in the budget for this kind of stuff. Am I right in assuming that this is the situation here, too?
- I don't suppose you've given any thought to what it might take in terms of investment to get this fixed for you, right?
- Think of hotels—are you imagining a 3-star, 4-star, or 5-star budget to get this fixed? [When they answer, ask, "...and that means what in terms of a range of price points?"]
- Where do you imagine the money for this kind of investment will come from, and whose money is it?
- Who controls the budget for this kind of issue, and shouldn't that person be involved in this process also?

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When you're trying to understand who else should be involved...

- In my house there are some decisions that are “mine,” and some that are “ours,” if you get my drift. How would you describe this decision for me?
- When a company such as yours usually buys this kind of stuff, for this kind of money, involving this sort of issue, or these many people, who has the final say?
- Who authorizes these kinds of decisions around here, and how long does it usually take? Is it like trying to get an octopus into a string bag?
- I don't suppose you have any idea who else we should talk to about this before I go away and spend my time and resources in putting a proposal together, do you?
- Tell me how to make sure that everyone that needs to see this, or comment, feels that they have had a chance to be heard. What should I do?

When you're trying to understand the timescales...

- What timeframe are you working towards? [Whatever the answer, consider asking: “Why so soon?”]
- Have you seen an increase in these types of issues over the last few months? Help me to understand if things are getting worse, and if so, how quickly?
- If I said that we couldn't possibly deliver this before _____, what do you think you'd do?
- What's more important: cost or speed? How about quality or speed?
- When, in terms of a date, would you like to start to see or feel the benefits of implementing this new solution?

When you want to get back on track when the sales interview is wandering...

- Can you tell me again about _____?
- What does your boss think about this situation?
- To be sure to get all of your agenda items on the table, what's the next thing that's concerning you most?
- Looking at the time we agreed upon for this meeting, what should we discuss next?
- I bet you can't guess what surprised me most about what you said earlier—what do you think it is?

Near the end of the sale...

- Of all the things we have discussed so far, what am I missing? What have we left out?
- So far in our discussion, what one thing has most surprised you?
- Why, and under what circumstances, would you consider giving us the opportunity to address these issues for you?
- What would you say if I thought you could be doing things better?
- Let's pretend that you are also planning to discuss this issue with some other suppliers. Who would you call? Why?

To figure out if an existing account is at threat...

- Looking back over the last six months—off the record—what is the worst thing that we did that made you want to throw us out of here?
- I'm sure over the last year we haven't been perfect; when did we come closest to you canning us?
- Can you take a moment to tell me the good, the bad, and the ugly of last year in terms of your satisfaction with us?
- Tell me, what's the one thing we can do better for you next year to make your job easier?
- Let's be straight with one another. You've given us business over the last year. Was it worth it? Where did we let you down?

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When teeing things up for a referral...

- I'm guessing that you don't know any other businesses like yours who are experiencing similar sorts of issues, do you?
- Imagine that things go well, and you give us the order. What would be the best way for me to ask you for a referral at the end of all of this?
- My business is built on referrals, so I'm almost certainly going to ask you at some point for your help in that regard. If I forget to mention it, will you be sure to remind me?
- What would you need to see from me in order for you to almost certainly refer me to everyone you know or care about?
- At the end of this process, let's agree to take a look in our little black books and see if we can figure out a couple of great referrals for each other. Does that sound fair?

Strategic questions for senior executives...

- Let's pretend that these issues were somehow magically solved right now, today; from your perspective alone, how much better would the next one, three, and five years look?
- Do you think this is mainly a staff, skills, strategy, structure, systems, or sales issue?
- How much would you guess the problem has cost your business in terms of money, profit, time, resources, energy, people, meetings, remedial action, consultants, and so on over the last [three] years?
- How critical is it to fix this thing? And how would you rate its importance?
- When you look back five years, did you expect to be ahead of where you are today? If so, how far ahead, and in which specific ways?

For meetings involving groups...

- Which of you called or arranged the meeting for us all today? Would it make sense for you to start by sharing what you might like us to address, think about, or discuss most today?
- What's the one key issue that the group all believes needs addressing first?
- Typically, when groups are involved in decisions such as this it's sometimes difficult to reach a timely consensus. I'm curious, and I hope you don't mind my asking: who's really in charge or has the casting vote?
- Is the decision going to be determined by a vote, or, if not, what other method will you use to decide who gets assigned this project?
- It's hard to present to a group. Can I ask: Who's really making this decision today? I'll try to keep taking that individual's temperature most; is that fair?

When presenting your wares/solution/price...

- Before we continue, can we agree what the next step would be if you like what you see? And by "like," I mean a solution that addresses all of the main points that we have discussed.
- How would you feel if I could show you a really perfect fix for this problem today?
- Before I show you our _____, let's take a few moments to recap everything that you said so far. Is that fair?
- I don't suppose you have imagined what you'd like to see from me today, right?
- Is what you have seen close to what you had hoped I might show you?

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If the buyer wants to “think it over”...

- That’s totally understandable. Most of our customers need time to think it through. Could it be that you’re worried about the cost, the implementation program, or not being too sure about what you’ve heard from us?
- Hmm. If I believed that you are making the wrong decision, how might I tell you that without you getting upset?
- Most of the time I hear, “Let me think about it,” when what I’m really hearing is, “No thanks.” Can you tell me—is that what’s happening here today?
- OK, well that makes sense. I think I’d be saying the same to you about now. What should we do next so that I properly understand when and if I should just close the file and move on?
- Makes sense. Tell me, if I don’t hear back from you by _____, what should I do?

When you feel the buyer is shopping your price/expertise...

- Are you looking for the cheapest PRICE or the cheapest COST to get the problem fixed?
- Are you likely to choose the lowest cost provider in this instance?
- If you could only have two, are you looking for a “good,” “fast,” or “cheap” solution?
- I don’t suppose you could share with me what prices you have had from others so far, could you?
- If we can’t get to within, say, 15% of your target price, what will you do next? [Whatever the response, ask, “What is your target price, and where did it come from?”]

When the buyer gives you the “go-ahead” (or order)...

- What do you imagine your bosses might say when you tell them that you have recommended us for the project?
- How do you feel about giving us the order, are you nervous about it at all?
- What was the single best thing that swung it for us?
- What do you imagine your biggest three internal barriers to implementation might be?
- When would be the best time to meet to talk about the next similar issue on your radar?

When you think it’s a “No”...

- I get it, it’s over; let’s call off the dogs. Just before I go, where did I go wrong?
- I’m getting the feeling that it’s all over. Am I right?
- Sounds to me that no matter what I said or what our solution could do for you, it still wouldn’t make any difference. Am I right?
- I’m getting the impression that you’re going to either choose another supplier, or do nothing at this time. No hard feelings, such is life. What is the one thing you wanted to see that we couldn’t do for you?
- Thanks for telling me “no.” I really appreciate the honesty. When would be best for us to talk again?

For any and all selling situations...

- Does that mean that you’re not open to new ideas?
- What do you like best about your current or past supplier?
- Why is it that what you already have is not doing the job properly?
- What do you wish you had known about this issue six months ago?
- What does your family say you should do about all of this when you mention it to them over dinner?

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To ask a candidate who has applied for a job...

- Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with a really difficult situation at work?
- When, in your last couple of jobs, have you taken a stand and advanced your convictions at the risk of causing conflict?
- Tell me about a time when you did not apply good listening skills. What were the consequences, and what would you do differently the next time?
- Describe a job where you were challenged to learn many new things at once. How did you accomplish it, and what approach do you use to build new knowledge and skills?
- What has been the most difficult negotiation situation you've faced? What did you say or do to get it resolved?

Questions for sales managers talking to their direct reports...

- What do you imagine will happen if you don't start finding new prospects to fill the sales pipeline?
- Which single aspect of your sales skills needs the most work at the moment?
- When you asked the prospect for a referral, what did he say?
- What are the typical 10 questions you get asked by clients and prospects, and how do you answer or respond to them?
- What are your specific plans to improve your sales conversion rates, reduce the sales cycle, keep key strategic clients, attain new "in-profile" clients, expand our client base, and regain lost clients?

Questions to ask YOURSELF when writing your daily journal...

- What am I most grateful for today?
- What's my biggest single goal for the next 24 hours?
- What did I learn yesterday that can help me most?
- What one habit am I working on strengthening to help me best succeed?
- What's the one single belief I am going to laser-focus on today?

And here's a bonus question for good measure since you made it all the way to the end. Ready? It's a really good one. Here we go....

- Good question—why do you ask?

A final word of warning. You should only ask a suspect, client, prospect, or team member a question when you're not *absolutely 100% sure what he feels, believes, wants to know, or understands.*

How often can you be 100% sure of any of those things?

Exactly.