

The background of the cover features a blue-tinted photograph of two men in business suits. They are positioned in profile, facing each other as if in a conversation. The man on the right is slightly taller and has his hand raised, gesturing while speaking. The background behind them is a bright, out-of-focus window with light rays streaming through. The overall mood is professional and collaborative.

**Jim Cathcart**

# **Connecting With Your Customer:**

**Understanding the  
Buyer's Needs**

**The Relationship Selling™ Series**

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# Keeping People in the Right Frame of Mind

In 1994, I had the opportunity to visit the White House with a small group of professional speakers. At the end of the tour, our group came to the foyer and while we were standing there my wife Paula said, “Oh my gosh, here he comes.”

We looked across the room and sure enough, there came the President of the United States. At that time it was Bill Clinton. He walked over and spent about ten minutes with our group, one-on-one, chatting with each of us. Someone in the group mentioned that we were professional speakers and commented that President Clinton, too, was in many ways a professional speaker. At that time Clinton looked directly at me and he said, “Half of my job is keeping people in the right frame of mind.”

**“Half of my job  
is keeping people  
in the right  
frame of mind.”**

– US President Bill Clinton  
*White House July 29, 1994*



When you stop to think about it, isn't half of your job, as a salesperson, to keep people in the right frame of mind? If someone looks unfavorably at you, at what you're offering, and at your company, you're unlikely to get their business no matter how great your price, product, or service. But if you can keep a person looking positively at your ideas and the relationship with you and your company, then everything else will be given full consideration and you'll have the opportunity to make a sale.

Your own frame of mind has a great deal to do with your customer's frame of mind, or your prospect's. If you think your job is simply to make a sale, chances are it will show in the way you talk with your customer. But if you have a service-oriented frame of mind, if you see yourself as being responsible for finding ways to make life better for your customer through your product or service, you will

produce more sales, larger sales, and a more pleasing sales experience each time.

Do you ever find yourself getting tense and uneasy in an almost desperate effort to make a sale? Anytime you do that, shift your frame of mind. Shift away from making a sale to asking yourself, “How can I make life better for this client today? How can I deal with this person in such a way that I genuinely help him or her?” By shifting your own frame of mind and the way you approach the subject, you can make that same shift in the way your customer views you and what you have to offer.

## Listen—and Learn

One of the vital parts of the sales process is understanding the person and her situation—understanding your prospect or customer. Several things will help you become better at understanding other people and their situations.

**1. Listening.** You've got to be able to not only hear, but convey to the other person that you genuinely want to hear.

**“The first meeting with a prospect is a time of discovery for me. I do more listening than talking. After they've given me one priority, I ask for a second and a third. Then I reconfirm their prioritized order. If I don't deliver my presentation addressing their priorities in order of importance, I've blown my sale.”**

– Pat Leonard

**2. Learning to qualify your prospects.** Know who is worth calling on. Know, once you're with someone, whether this dialogue is worth continuing or whether you ought to move on to someone else. If it's not going to end in a good sale for you and for them, you should move on for the time being.

**3. Determining how buying decisions of this type are made by this of person or in this client's company.**

You need to know how they make decisions: Do they check with someone else, do they do an analysis first, do they just go with their gut and say “yes” or “no?” How are decisions like this made?



**4. Identifying the need gap for each customer or prospect.** What's the gap between what they have currently and what they need or want?

**5. Confirming that customer's felt need and his strongest interest.** When I say "felt need," I mean, for example, someone might need a better financial plan, but if he doesn't feel the need for a financial plan, he's probably not going to do anything about it. So confirm what it is he feels a need for. If he feels a need for more control over their own life or career, focus on that. If he feels a need for a little more safety, a little more security, a little more reassurance, confirm that so that you're able to move forward building on what he cares about.

**6. Identifying the personality pattern of your prospects and your clients.** In other words, know whether they tend to be of one behavioral type or another. Know whether their values and your values are similar. Whether their velocity and your velocity are compatible, whether their intellectual bandwidth and the way that you're presenting your information are compatible. Understand more about the personality patterns of your prospects and your clients.

**7. Asking good questions.** It's not enough to just stimulate the person to give you information that you need—you need to be skilled at asking good questions. What are the types of questions, what are the ways you could phrase those questions, what could you do to sharpen your skill in encouraging other people to tell you what you need to know?

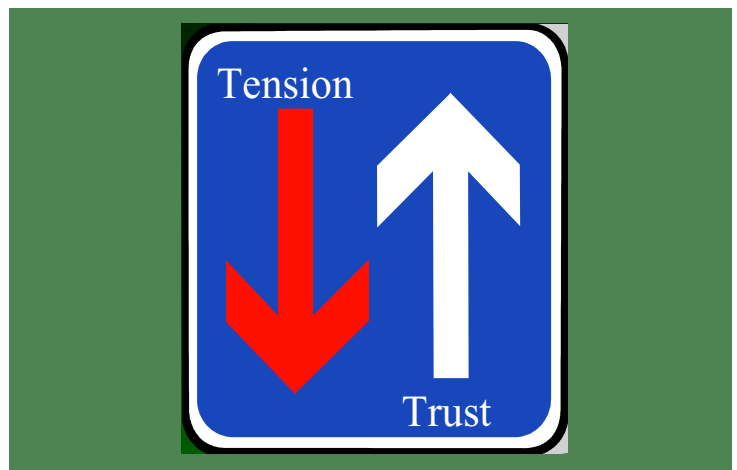


"That's uncanny! How did you know that we formed the company in the early '70's?"

When you do these seven things—sharpen your listening ability, learn to qualify prospects, determine how the buying decisions are made, identify the need gap, confirm the customer's felt need, identify their personality pattern, and learn to ask good questions, then you truly are able to understand the situation and the person.

(To order Jim's Relationship Selling™ audio CD with 19 interviews, visit <https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/orderform.html>.)

## Managing Tension and Trust



There are two elements in a sales relationship that are absolutely vital to how that relationship unfolds: tension and trust. When tension is high between two people, the trust level is low. When tension is low, typically the trust level is high.

How do you control this? Tension arises out of the way you present yourself, among other things. So if you come on as a very strong, aggressive sales person, a lot of times the first effect you have on other people is not a bonding effect, but rather a defensive effect. They start defending themselves from you because they see you as an aggressor. Try this exercise: Ask someone if he would perform a simple exercise with you. Hold up your hand and ask him to place his hand against it. Then, as he places his hand against it, start to press on his hand, pushing toward him. What you will find is he will probably push back. It's a natural, instinctive response. When we push, other people

resist. They don't have to think about it, it just happens. So when we present ourselves in an aggressive mode, other people tend to resist us instead of trusting us.

Tension tends to go up when you don't look trustworthy. If you don't dress or carry yourself in the way that one would expect a sales professional would carry himself, it doesn't mean you're not a sales professional, it means you don't look like one to this customer. And if you don't look like one, people who don't know you yet won't trust you very much.

A sure-fire way that we can increase tension is by communicating in a way that's only comfortable for us. Those who are good at reducing tension, connecting with people, and relating in a positive way, tend to start by listening and observing rather than by speaking and expressing.

Present yourself to the other person in ways that make it pleasant for the other person to listen to you, to share information with you, to connect with you. As you learn to manage the tension level in the relationship, the trust level will build on its own. When we do what trustworthy people do, people tend to lower the tension level and open themselves up to more communication.



**"This is a safe forum for discussing your concerns.  
Please ignore the video recorder."**

## How to Be Welcomed by Your Customers

One way to be welcomed by your customers is to be in the right frame of mind. Prepare yourself mentally for selling. What does that mean to you? What do you have to do to get into the right frame of mind to be making a sales contact?

Think about a time when you were in the perfect frame of mind for a sales call. Can you recall one? If not, just think about a time when you were in a terrific mood and really had an optimistic attitude going into any kind of an interpersonal dealing.

Take a sheet of paper and write a little narrative to yourself that describes the mood, the attitude, the situation, and the point of view that you had when that happened. Then study that and see how you can duplicate pieces of that intentionally, in the future, to keep yourself in the right frame of mind for selling.

When you can cultivate the ability to keep yourself in the right frame of mind for selling, then you go into every sales contact with confidence. You bring energy instead of drawing energy from the other person. You make a positive contribution and people look forward to seeing you. Instead of going into someone's office and saying, "May I take a minute of your time?" (note the emphasis on "TAKE a minute of YOUR time"), we ought to go in there and say, "Do you have a minute? I've got an idea you're going to love!" The difference in those two is enormous. One of those is taking from them, the other one is bringing to them.

Another aspect of being perceived as good news is developing a history of positive experiences with each client. Plan to make each contact intentionally upbeat and valuable to the prospect or client. If you always add something to their day then they will look forward to your next visit.

Build the habit of finding good things wherever you go. Look for people, specific behaviors and things to compliment, bring along useful ideas regardless whether they relate directly to your product or not. Just be sure that they relate to your client's interests.

We should always cultivate the kind of thinking, the kind of feeling, the kind of mood, and the kind of behavior that will convey to the other person, "Here comes good news!" Remember: Business should be practiced as an act of friendship rather than a process of negotiation.

# Being a Partner Versus a Persuader

When I was twenty-two years old, I worked as a field representative for GMAC collecting payments on past due accounts and repossessing log trucks in the hills of Northern Arkansas. Repossessing log trucks in the Ozarks can be life-threatening work. I was young, inexperienced, and didn't have a clue how dangerous the job could be.

On a typical day, I would drive down some deserted logging road back in the woods. I'd find the truck I was looking for and I'd pull my company car up and park. I'd walk boldly over to the truck, where some big hair-covered animal would step down out of the cab and look down at me from about a head taller than I am. I'd look up, look him squarely in the chin, and say, "I'm here to get your truck." He'd say, "Hey boy, why don't you just leave me alone? We're alone in these woods and I don't think you want to push this issue."

And I'd say, "You know, you're right, and I am willing to leave. But you need to understand that I'm the last nice guy my company intends to send."

He'd say, "What do you mean 'last nice guy'?"  
I'd say, "Well, after me they turn it over to the Sheriff."

People come out here with guns, and it's just not a pretty sight."

He'd say, "Now wait a minute! Before you go that far, what are my alternatives?"

I would sit down and discuss alternatives with them, and nine times out of ten, I'd either get a payment, or a partial payment if they had that. Or, if they had no money at all and they were that far behind on their bills, they'd just turn the truck over to me.

I did OK as a bill collector. I didn't like the work, but I did OK. The guy who came in after me didn't do so well. His name was Pete Smith, and he made a serious tactical error. He went directly from his service in the Marine Corps into bill collecting. Pete came out of the Marine Corps with a combative attitude that he took with him to this new job. It was only a few days into the job when he called on Monroe.

Monroe was a guy from whom I had been getting partial payments and late payments for about six months. Then when Pete took over, he decided it was time to clean up this account. Pete went out to Monroe's house at seven o'clock at night, in the dark, showed up on the front porch, banged on the door, and yelled out some kind of a challenge. Monroe accepted the challenge, stepped onto the front porch, and beat Pete Smith to a pulp!

Pete was in the hospital for ten days over that little encounter on the front porch. I looked at him and thought, *Good heavens, here's a guy with broken bones, gashes and bruises, who got hurt by calling on the same person I was calling on. And yet that guy who beat him up was giving payments to me. What's the difference between me and Pete?*

The difference was our attitude toward what we were doing. Pete's attitude was that he was the enforcer of the contract. He was out there to persuade people to do his bidding. Do you know some sales people who do that? They go out to persuade people to buy, regardless of what the other person cares about or whether they've got the money or not. Well, that was Pete's attitude.

My belief was that if I tried what Pete was doing, I'd never have offspring. So I decided, instead, it would be much wiser to go out, not as a persuader, but as a partner in problem solving. So I would go out each day to show the person how, by cooperating with me, they could get my company off of their back.

Be it bill collecting or traditional selling, if you go into a sales situation as a partner in problem solving, the people lower their defenses and cooperate. When you go in as a persuader to talk them into buying, they raise their defenses and resist. Be a partner, not a persuader.

On many occasions we intend to behave as a partner but the customer perceives us as trying simply to persuade them. In those instances, it is a good idea to simply ease up and ask more questions. Listen more. Notice what the person is and is not saying.

When you become more interested in the customer, they become more interested in you. After all, in a "partnership" both parties talk and lead.

# Your Unique Selling Proposition

**Wal-Mart** *"We sell for less."*

**Volvo** *"Safety"*

**Disney** *"Magic" & "The Happiest Place on Earth"*

**Ritz Carlton** *"Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen."*

**A Baptist Minister** *"I sell fire prevention. " (Think about it.)*

Have you ever heard anyone talk about conducting an "elevator presentation?"

The term "elevator presentation" is a quick way of describing what it is you do and why it matters to other people. This should be so short and concise that you could deliver it to another person while you were on an elevator between floors. In other words, very short, very efficient, very powerful.

Everyone needs that kind of a statement. Some people call this your competitive advantage statement. Others call it your unique selling proposition. What is it that you bring to the marketplace or to the customer that brings them value? What is it that you offer that makes their world a better place for them to be?

Try to come up with a statement that you can deliver in thirty seconds or less, which tells people your name, your company, a statement about a typical problem that people in your target market experience—and, most important, an intriguing description of how you help solve that problem. For example, if I were in the financial services business, someone might say, "What do you do?" I could reply, "My name is Jim Cathcart, and I'm with Financial Services Company. I give people more control over their money." That would intrigue most people. "What do you mean you give people control over their money?"

"Well, I mean that most people don't feel that they have the degree of control over their personal money that they would like to have. So, I show them how to know what they've got, how to manage what they've got, and how to

plan for having more of it so that their money is working for them, as well as them working for money."

In a statement like that you've encapsulated a lot of the value that you bring and you've told people what area you focus on. The ideal response to an elevator presentation or a unique selling proposition is, "What do you mean?" or, "Tell me more." If you're giving people business opportunities by going into business with you, then let them know the value of those business opportunities. Don't explain the business opportunity itself, that's next. First, describe the value.

If you're selling automobiles and someone asks you what you do, say, "I help people travel in style."

They might respond, "Oh, you're a travel agent?"

"No, not in the traditional sense. But I certainly help people make every trip a little bit more pleasant and do it in style. I represent the XYZ Luxury Cars." And tell them what you do for people.

Focusing on the value is the key. The unique selling proposition is the value you bring, not the product or service you sell. So come up with a little, quick statement that tells people what you do.

The most unique elevator statement I ever heard was a man who claimed, "I'm in the fire prevention business." As it turns out, he was a preacher. His message from the pulpit each Sunday was designed to guide people to heaven, not the other direction. So he was "selling fire prevention."

*What is your unique selling proposition?*

## Three Essentials for a Healthy Relationship

**A healthy and productive relationship requires three elements:**

- 1. A mutual commitment to making the relationship work**
- 2. Open and frequent communication between the participants**
- 3. Clear agreements to help you know what you expect from each other**



For each relationship you have, ask yourself whether these three essential elements are in place. Are both parties mutually committed to make it work? Is there open, frequent communication in which we clearly tell each other the truth? Are we clearly aware of what we expect from each other?

The quickest way to develop commitment is to work on communication. The more open and honest your communication and the more frequently you are in touch with that person, the more likely he or she is to feel committed to the relationship.

Clear expectations also depend on communication. First, look at your own expectations. Do you expect the other person to give you access to useful information? Do you expect him or her to call you when a problem arises, or solve it alone via your website?

To cultivate these three essentials, choose one at a time. The more fully you show your commitment to the other person, the more you will get commitment in return. If you find that most of your relationships are one-sided in this area, then perhaps you have been reluctant to make more of a commitment. Tell yourself the truth and work on being more generous even before you have tangible justification for doing so.

To get open communication, give open communication. Practice disclosing more when appropriate. Share your own thoughts and feelings. And listen better. Good listeners generate more openness than those who are just good talkers.

For clear expectations it is valuable to occasionally review what you are looking for from each other. Review what you are trying or hoping to achieve and discuss how you can help each other to achieve it.

These three essentials will work together to make all your relationships more productive and more satisfying.

## Understanding Your Customer's Needs

One of the greatest ways to be a more effective salesperson is to understand human needs. We all have needs, some of them basic, others sublime. Think of ways that you can meet some of the following customer needs through what you do in your selling. We all have these needs on some level. Notice these needs in your customer and you'll notice more selling opportunities:

- The need for recognition
- The need for physical comfort
- The need to be competent
- The need for timely service
- The need to avoid stress
- The need to be understood
- The need for self-esteem
- The need to be remembered
- The need to be respected
- The need to be needed and wanted
- The need to make one's own decisions
- The need for information
- The need for connections with other people
- The need to trust
- The need to be trusted
- The need for emotional support
- The need for laughter
- The need for intellectual stimulation
- The need for meaningful work
- The need for accomplishment
- The need to be successful
- The need for recreation
- The need for self-disclosure



## CASE STUDY

### INTUIT

The company that revolutionized the way business owners manage their finances saw their greatest competitor was not in the industry. As INTUIT founder Scott Cook recalls, “The greatest competitor to small business owners was the pencil. The pencil is a really tough and resilient substitute. Yet the entire industry had overlooked it.”

By simply asking potential buyers of QUICKEN software why they preferred a pencil over the computerized solutions, INTUIT learned two critical insights: the pencil was much cheaper and easier to use.

INTUIT focused on bringing out both the decisive advantages that the computer has over the pencil—speed and accuracy—and the decisive advantages that the pencil has over computers—simplicity of use and low price—and eliminated everything else. With its user-friendly screen that replicates the user’s own checkbook, QUICKEN is almost as simple to use as the pencil. Further, INTUIT deleted all of the sophisticated features that were part of the industry’s conventional wisdom and offered only a few basic functions that the majority of customers use. Simplifying the software cut costs. The end result was a breakthrough value created by QUICKEN and a re-creation of the industry—lead by INTUIT.

SOURCE: Harvey Kim, David Mauborgne, “Getting It Done,” *Brand Strategy*, October 1998.

The more you can recognize one’s needs, the more you can understand the connection between what you bring, and what they need, and the more likely you are to get the sale. How many of the above needs can you meet for your next customer?

## CASE STUDY

### Revlon

Charles Revson, founder of Revlon cosmetics, was said to be a firm believer in the critical role people play in the marketing mix. He was often fond of saying, to seemingly anybody who would listen, “In the factory, we make cosmetics; in the store, our people sell hope.”

(To sign up for Jim’s Relationship Selling™ e-Course, visit [https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/relationship\\_selling\\_elrn.html](https://secure.parkerwebsolutions.com/cathcart/relationship_selling_elrn.html).)

# What The Customer Experiences

There are three elements that will determine the success of your sales career: the people, the processes, and the products. When a customer looks at you and your company, they see the people they deal with—you and the others who provide what they want. They see the processes they have to go through in order to deal with you. And, they see the products or services that they get from doing business with you. You can influence all three of these areas.

## CASE STUDY

### Cadillac and Lincoln

In the 1990s when U.S. luxury carmakers surveyed customers, they often asked such questions as “How satisfied are you with the cleanliness of our service department?” and “How comfortable was our waiting room lounge?” and other questions about less essential aspects of the customer’s sales experience. Customers often responded that they were “highly satisfied.” But many of those same car buyers shortly thereafter traded their Cadillacs and Lincolns in for a luxury import, such as a Lexus or Infiniti. Why?

The surveys had captured the customer's satisfaction levels, but not the importance of the items being surveyed. That's like getting "A"s in courses that don't count toward your diploma. Be sure you know what your customer cares about before resting on your performance reviews.

Today it appears that both Cadillac and Lincoln have learned their lessons well. They are focusing more on the things the customers want and value the most.

As salespeople, we *are* the people in this equation. We are the ones who are providing the sales services. So we can upgrade the experience the customer has in dealing with us by focusing on the ways in which we connect with them.

**The processes.** What does a person have to go through in order to deal with you? Do they have to fill out a lot of forms? Do they have to look up a bunch of information to fill in those forms? Do they have to go through a series of trials and tests and other steps to get to a point where they can start receiving the benefit of your product or service? Do they have to order through some remote location or in some convoluted way that makes the buying process awkward for them?

As salespeople, we can often streamline this buying process and make it much, much easier for them to get what they're seeking from us. For example, I just bought a domain name from GoDaddy.com. The process was so easy that I completed the transaction with a smile on my face. Their system filled in all my contact data from my last transaction with them and made my options so clear that I could just scan the page, select what I wanted, skip right past the upgrades I didn't want, and complete the purchase. Then I got two confirmation emails with easy follow up directions within minutes of the purchase.

Now, what could you do that would have a similar effect? Could you do a bit of online research on your client's website so that you don't ask so many tedious questions? How can you make it easier and more pleasant to buy from you?

When Kaman Music delivered my three new guitars last year, their district representative brought them to my home and had already tuned and prepared them for me. I opened the cases, played the guitars, and smiled for about two days! Improving the processes of buying from you will provide your customers with a memorable, positive purchasing experience.

**Your product or service itself.** You can enhance what customers see and experience by staying in touch and monitoring their experience of using what you have sold. You see, the company doesn't know what the customer's experience is once they've bought, unless somebody tells them. That's your job. It's up to you to constantly give feedback to the company about what's working, what's not working, what's popular, what's unpopular, what's easy and appealing, what's difficult and unappealing to the customer. Your information may influence the company's plans for the next year and for the next product line or enhancement.

**"One of the two sustainable strategic advantages in the new global marketplace is an obsession with customers. Customers, not markets."**

*Tom Peters*

One of the ways you advance the products and services your company offers is by knowing what to *wonder* about rather than knowing what to ask about. Until you are curious about the right things, it doesn't matter what kind of questions you come up with. The questions ought to grow out of the needed information. Here are some questions that you'll often need to have answered:

- How will the customer use your product or service?
- Who else is bidding for this customer's business?
- When will this decision be made?
- What other needs does the customer have?
- How could this person benefit from having more than one of your products or services?
- How long is their payment cycle?
- Why is this particular item so important to the customer?
- Where does the decision maker go to get his or her information?

- If there's more than one decision maker, in what sequence are decisions like this one made?
- How are major decisions made within this organization?
- Who reports to whom? To know in advance, check with an assistant to determine titles and the sequence of their reporting to each other.
- Is there a break-off point where this person's decision-making authority ends? For example, does he or she need to consult a supervisor or someone else for decisions when they go above a certain dollar figure?
- Does someone else screen purchases before the buying decision is made?
- In the case of a committee, who will present your ideas to the group, and who has the most authority to make a decision on that committee?
- Who, besides the decision maker, really has an influence on the choices that are made?
- What does the buyer really want and need?

When you know what to wonder about, you'll know how to structure your questions to get the right answers. Use this as a checklist prior to each sales contact.

## What the Customer Needs

Here are some topics for you to study and things you will need to understand to be effective with each customer.

**1. Current situation versus desired situation.** What is the customer's need gap—what they need now versus what they're getting now, what they hope for versus what they are receiving? If you know the need gap, you're better able to fill that gap.

**2. Psychological factors.** Try to discover if they're buying for prestige, for love, for imitation, for keeping up with the Joneses, for fear, for variety, to spice things up, or just purely for practical reasons. What are the psychological factors in their decision?

**3. What's the prospect's point of view?** How does your prospect feel about this purchase? Is she afraid to

spend the money? Is her reputation on the line? What are the personal risks and rewards associated with this purchase from her point of view?

**4. Key decision makers.** You've got to know who's playing. You've got to know the cast of characters and their input into the decision-making. Otherwise, you may spend too much time with the wrong person. Know who's making the decision.

**5. Buying urgency.** Are they just shopping around leisurely, or getting bids, or in a hurry to make a deal? How important is it to them to make a decision right away?

**6. Buying criteria.** How are they going to judge whether what you're suggesting really meets your customers' needs or not? What characteristics are most important to them? Are they buying quality, price, service, or the ability to customize?

**7. Political influences.** You may be bidding against your prospect's brother-in-law or mentor. Knowing this sure helps you make a better sales presentation. And it helps you form a strategy that's right for them. Know as much as possible about the internal politics, about the way things make this person look or the way things influence other outcomes.

**8. What about their bad experiences?** It's not uncommon for you to find accounts who have had bad experiences with your company or one like yours. The ideal solution is to resolve the problem, if it's your company, or change their attitude to a positive one and then move on. But many times, without knowing about their bad experience, you get blind-sided by their fear or reluctance to say yes and you're not ready to respond to it. So probe to understand what bad experiences they might have had.

**9. Product or service demands.** If you are penetrating a new industry or market, you need to find out as soon as possible whether your product or service will have to meet some standard of quality, some level of performance, or some type of certification. You need to know what the demands are before you go in there. What criteria are you going to have to meet in order to be in the game at all?

**10. What are the monetary constraints?** Part of qualifying a prospect is determining their buying power.

But that changes over time. So keep your understanding of their buying ability current by asking the right questions. And if the situation turns sour, don't lose hope. Sometimes they can borrow or take money from another department or budget to pay for your product or service. Your job is to show how moving that money would be a wise move on their part.

## Tips for Effective Questioning

Here are ten tips for more effective questioning that will put your customer in the right mindset:

**1. Ask permission.** May I ask you some questions about your business? Too many times people tell us what they want. They don't ask, they tell. They say, "Let me ask you a question." That's a demand—not a request. Instead say, "May I ask you a few questions about your business?" Or, "May I ask you a question?"

**2. Start broad and then get specific.** "Tell me more about your business." That's a broad, non-threatening way to begin a dialogue. You need to demonstrate that you have done your homework, checked their website, etc. But then you can ask for more with a broad question. When you start off by saying, "Tell me exactly how much absenteeism you have in a typical week," you're getting too specific too soon. Begin with broad questions, develop the dialogue, and then become specific as you move along, eventually zeroing in on exactly what you really need to know to finalize the commitment.

**3. Build on the previous responses.** When someone says something to you, remember it and use that information in your future statements. This technique shows your sales prospect that you are listening to what they are saying. For example, a woman might tell you, "I own six flower shops that specialize in decorating for large events." Your response, "You specialize in large events, why did you choose that niche?"

She responds, "Lower overhead, I can work out of a warehouse rather than a storefront, I don't have to maintain perishable stock, I can order in large quantities only when needed and that keeps my prices down."

Your response to that answer should be something like, "That certainly makes good sense. What do you specifically mean when you say large events? How would you define that, and what are the minimum size orders you deal with?"

**4. Use the prospect's industry language or jargon when appropriate.** When you're talking to an expert, don't try to be an expert at the same level as they are, but show your own expertise or understanding of their expertise by asking questions using the right language. If you're talking to a neophyte, don't embarrass him or her with your technical jargon. This is especially true in retail sales where customers look to the salespeople for guidance. They don't want to be confused by your big language; they want to be enlightened by your understanding.

**5. Keep your questions simple.** If you want answers you can use, ask useful questions. Keep your questions to one, simple part. Don't ask two-part, three-part, or four-part questions.

The master of this process is Bill Bachrach. Bill created BAI, Inc. with the goal of transforming the financial services industry from "salespeople" into "trusted advisors." And it's working. His firm has trained and continues to train thousands of top professionals.

One of the cornerstones of their training is what they call "The Values Conversation." This is a dialogue in which the financial advisor guides the client through an exploration of what is important to them. Bill has them repeatedly ask, in one context or another, "What is important about money to you?" This is reframed and asked more narrowly as the answers emerge. For example: One might say that money affords freedom. He'd then reply, "What is important about freedom to you?" And on until they find the core value that overrides all the others. Then the advisor presents solutions in the most direct ways that show how "freedom" or "safety" or whatever is to be achieved through this plan. How can you apply this kind of questioning with your customers to help them tell you what they want most from you?

**6. Use a logical sequence for your questions.** People want to know where you're headed with this, where your questions are going. If they can't tell, they might feel like you're trying to manipulate them. So, ask in a logical order, starting with broad questions before moving into specifics.



**7. Keep questions non-threatening.** Ask your questions in a way that is open ended and that does not touch on sensitive areas unless they absolutely have to.

**8. If a question is sensitive, explain why it's important.** It makes sense to justify a sensitive question to your prospect. After all, they have a right to know why you want to know. For example, if you are asking about their personal finances, their health, or their contractual agreements with others, these can be considered potentially threatening disclosures. Understand that people may be reluctant to answer right away. Build trust first, then progress from general information to specifics.

**9. Focus on the desired benefits.** Not all prospects are experts in their particular field; many of them need to be informed and educated, especially about your products, features, and benefits. So ask them what they want to achieve, not necessarily how they think they'll achieve it. That keeps you in the position of being able to show how you will fulfill those needs.

**10. Maintain a consultative attitude.** Ask questions as a consultant and an advisor, in a way that yields the most information with the least strain or tension. Ask questions in a relaxed manner and patiently wait for the responses; listen well, invest a little time now and you'll save a lot of time later.

(To take Jim Cathcart's Relationship Selling Online Sales Readiness 360 Self-Assessment Test now: <http://www.relationship-selling.net/assessmentorder.asp>.)

## Ten Keys for Active Listening

Here are ten keys to being a good listener:

**1. Resist distractions.** Ignore the internal noises that get in your way. When you're thinking about something else, you're not thinking about what the person is saying to you.

**2. Take notes.** People remember about twenty-five to fifty percent of what they hear, so take enough notes to help you recall the full content of the conversation—especially in a sales situation. You might want to ask the other person, "Do you mind if I take some notes?"

**3. Let people tell their story.** When getting to know someone, or when listening to the customer's problem, let them tell the story from their perspective. Don't interrupt them, don't edit what they're saying; hear what they're saying and understand them. A lot of value is revealed in a person's narrative. Save your questions or comments for later.

**4. Offer verbal feedback.** Little cues that let them know you're listening: "Uh huh, yeah, oh, yes, I see, sure, I understand, OK, got it." But be careful not to overdo it. Leave plenty of silences so that they are encouraged to share even more.

**5. Listen selectively.** Read between the lines. Look for the important things that people convey in the way that they're saying something, or maybe even in what they're not mentioning. Sometimes what they mean to say is contained more in what they left out than what they focused on.



**6. Relax.** Create an environment in which your customer or prospect will feel comfortable telling you what they've got to say.

**7. Listen with your entire body.** Recognize that they're not just noticing your eyes and your mind; they're noticing your body. People send clues when they're not listening. Use good eye contact, but don't stare them down. Nod in agreement, relax, and make it easy for someone to tell you what he has to say.

**8. Be aware of personal space.** If you get too close to someone, you create more tension. If you get too far away from them, you make the conversation less amiable.

**9. Ask questions.** Gently probe with the types of questions that expand the discussion and allow the person to share more information.

**10. Genuinely care about what they're saying.** If you don't sincerely care what someone has to say to you, you're going to have a hard time being a good listener. And if you can't, then fake it. There's no such thing as a totally uninteresting speaker. There are only uninterested listeners.

**Listening is wanting to hear!**

## Irritating Listening Habits

Here are 22 irritating listening habits—things that people do or don't do that cause you or me to feel like they're not listening. Catch yourself on those that you're guilty of and learn to eliminate as many of them as possible.

1. He does all the talking. I go in with a problem, and never get a chance to open my mouth.
2. She interrupts me when I talk.
3. He never looks at me when I talk. I'm not sure he's listening.
4. She continually toys with a pencil or paper while I'm talking. I wonder if she's listening.
5. His poker face keeps me guessing whether he understands or is even paying attention to me.
6. She never smiles. I'm afraid to talk to her.
7. He changes what I'm saying. He puts words in my mouth.
8. She puts me on the defensive any time I ask a question.
9. Occasionally, he asks a question about what I've just told him which shows he wasn't paying attention.

10. She argues with everything I say, even before I have a chance to finish my case.
11. Everything I say reminds him of some experience he's had or heard of. He always says, "You know, that reminds me," and he's always doing a one-upmanship. He knows or did more than I did.
12. When I'm talking, she finishes my sentences for me.
13. He acts as if he's just waiting for me to finish so he can jump in with something of his own.
14. All the time I'm talking, she's looking out the window at something else.
15. He looks at me like he's trying to stare me down.
16. She looks like she's appraising me. I begin to wonder if I have a smudge on my face or a tear in my jacket.
17. He looks as if he's constantly thinking "no," or questioning the truthfulness of what I'm saying.
18. She overdoes certain gestures trying to show me that she's listening—too many nods of her head and "mm hmm's, uh huh's."
19. He sits too close to me.
20. She frequently looks at her watch or the clock while I'm talking.
21. He is completely withdrawn and distant when I'm talking.
22. She acts as if she's doing me a favor by seeing me.

How many of these are you often guilty of? Are you sure? Find a truthful friend and seek input on your listening habits.



"By the way, what's the office policy on smoking?"

## 7 Ways to Build Trust

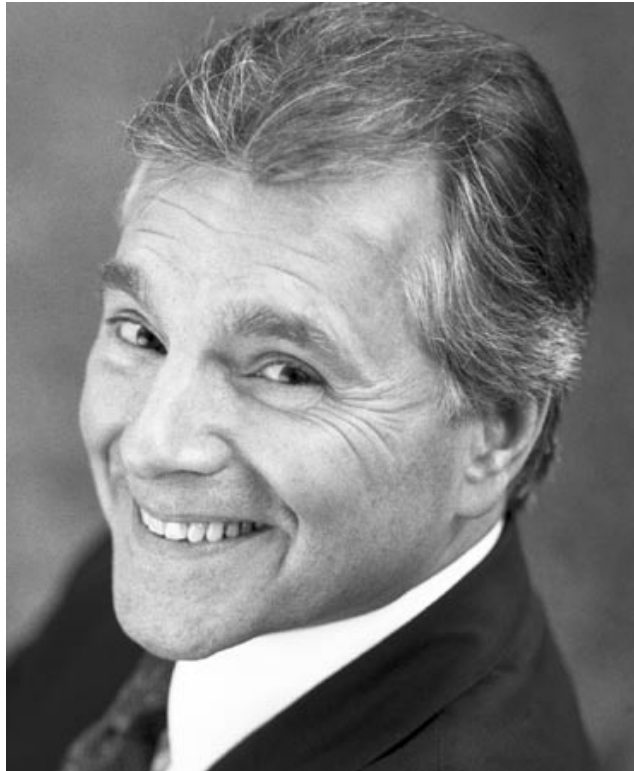
By becoming a better listener, you will help construct the connection you need to understand your customer's needs. Once you have established a strong connection, a trust level will be established between you and your client. Here are seven keys to cultivating that trust level:

1. Deserve people's trust. Be trustworthy and reliable. Don't ever cheat even a little.
2. Appear to be trustworthy. Avoid even the impression of deceit. Manage the way others perceive you. Correct errors quickly and fully. Don't let rumors or misconceptions endure beyond one day.
3. Do what trustworthy people do. Find out what others trust and admire and do likewise.
4. Be willing to trust others. If you can't do it why should they?
5. Always do more than you are required to do. Give a little extra. Do some of the work that is not "your job." Go the extra mile.
6. Deliver what you promise. Always and without exception. Be a person who is as good as his or her word. Deserve this, "If you say it, I know I can take it to the bank."
7. Do what is right. Always.

When you connect with people intellectually, they will probably share their "thoughts" with you, but not necessarily their "feelings." The problem with that is that feelings drive purchases. Customers may *think* through a purchase in order to avoid making a bad decision, but when the time comes to make a commitment, their *feelings* take control. If you have caused them to be apprehensive or concerned about you in any way, the tension will rise and the sale will not happen. But when you connect with people emotionally—their "heart" in addition to their "head"—then they *want* to do business with you. In essence, they *trust* you. And as my lifelong friend and colleague, Dr. Tony Alessandra, says, "When two people want to do business with each other, the details won't keep them apart. But when they don't want to do business with each other, the details (like price) won't make the deal happen."

This eBook has focused on the elements that constitute human connections: listening, understanding motives and values, showing that you care, taking the time to understand the person, their company, and their situation. We no longer live in a world where information exchange causes sales. It is customized problem solving and building trust that wins the day.

**Now, go forth and multiply your sales!**



## About the Author

### Jim Cathcart

High achievers from around the world credit the advice and inspiration of Jim Cathcart as keys to their personal advancement. As the author of thirteen books on business and psychology including two best sellers, *The Acorn Principle* and *Relationship Selling*, Jim Cathcart's works are in use by businesses and universities worldwide.

CEO and founder of Cathcart Institute, Inc., Jim sits on several corporate boards plus the Board of Visitors of Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management.

He is one of the world's top professional speakers and business authors and has been inducted into the Speaker Hall Of Fame, received the Golden Gavel Award from Toastmasters International, and the Cavett Award from the National Speakers Association. Jim became a member of Speakers Roundtable, 20 of the top professional speakers in the world, in 1986.

Cathcart Institute, Inc., founded in 1977, is a network of highly qualified business advisors who teach Jim Cathcart's concepts and strategies for Relationship Selling and personal advancement. The Relationship Selling Sales Excellence System is built upon the principles of personal accountability and structured to utilize all of an organization's learning resources, not just the material in this book. Business leaders and top salespeople turn to Cathcart Institute, Inc. for training, inspiration and personal advice in their quest to reach the top one percent of their field.

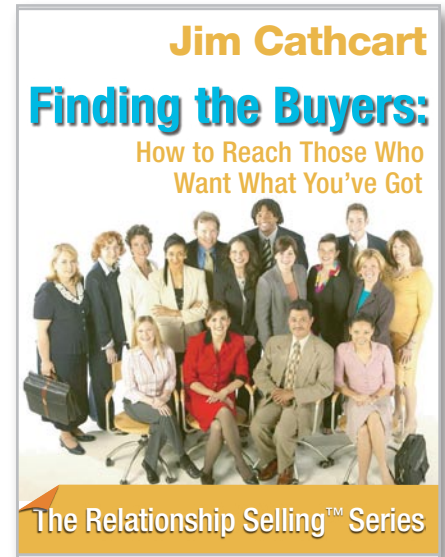
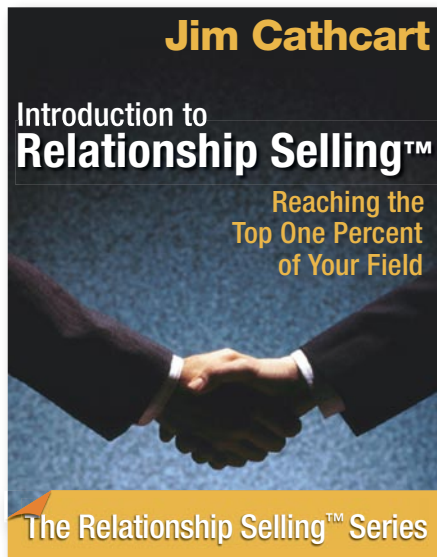
With over 2,500 speeches delivered to more than 1,500 different clients worldwide, Jim Cathcart has reached hundreds of thousands of business professionals in person.

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