

# Consultative Questioning



Since the advent of the Internet, the prospect has taken over more and more control of the sale. Let's learn how questioning gives us better insights and how it can help us take back control.

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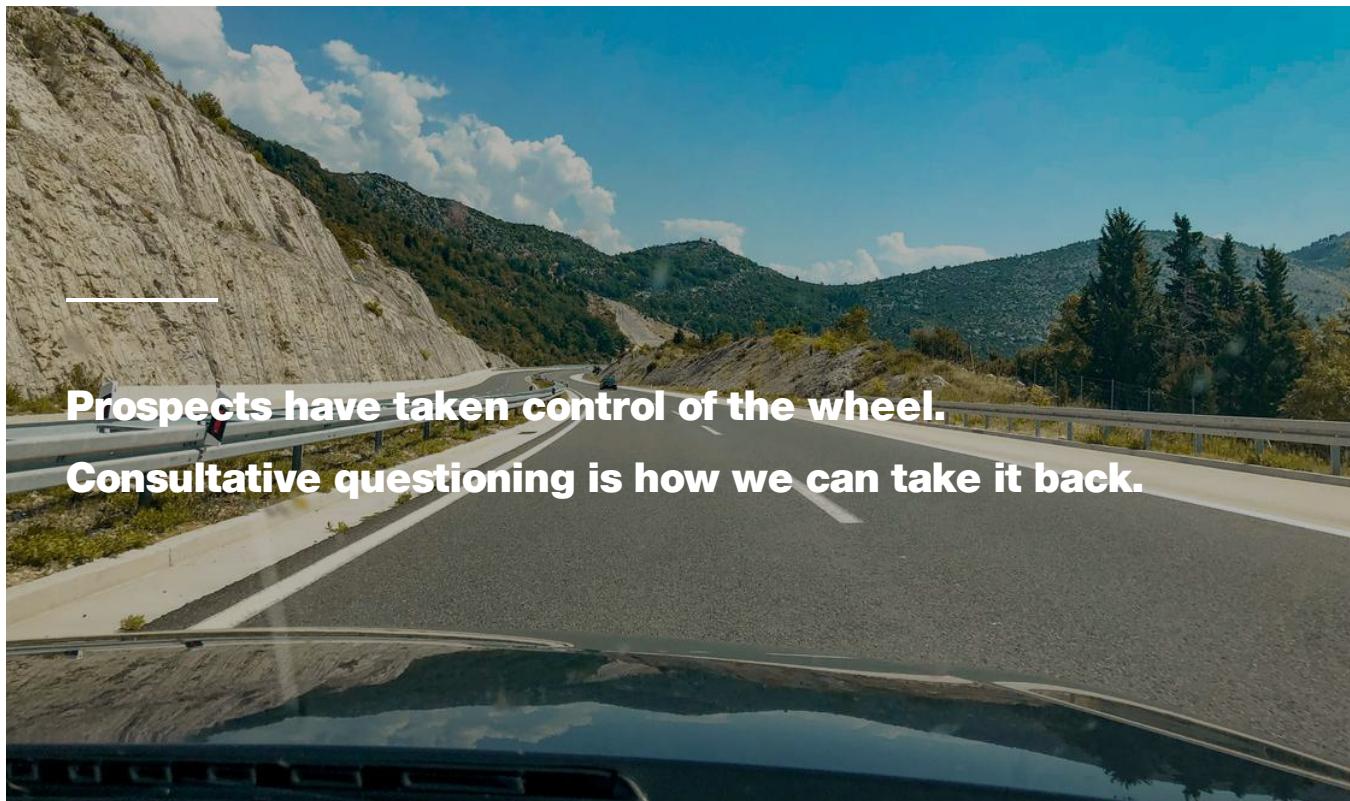
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# INTRODUCTION

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Since the advent of the internet, the prospect has taken over more and more control of the sale. The seller's role has shifted to accommodate this. No longer an information distributor, the seller must now become more of a consultant.

Consultative questioning is the consultant's greatest tool. It allows better insight to uncover the true source of problems and helps prospects define their challenges in new ways.

*Today, good questioning is good selling.*

In this lesson you will learn:

- Why questioning skills are crucial to build trust, gaining influence, and winning sales
- What the different types of questions are
- When the appropriate time is to ask each type of question

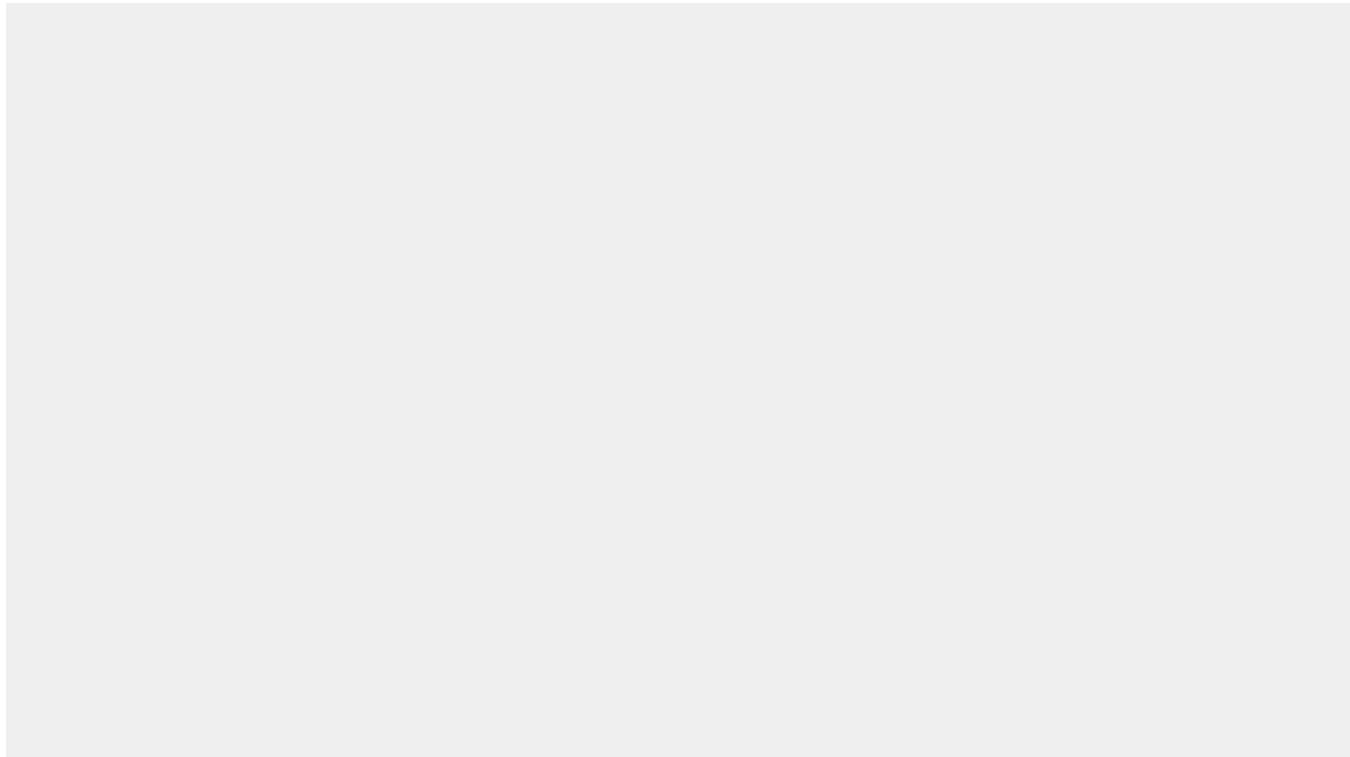
**CONTINUE**

## WHY QUESTIONING IS IMPORTANT

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**Questioning is the basis of finding priority.**

**Watch** the video below to learn why consultative questioning is critical to making the sale.



## **When You Ask Good Questions**



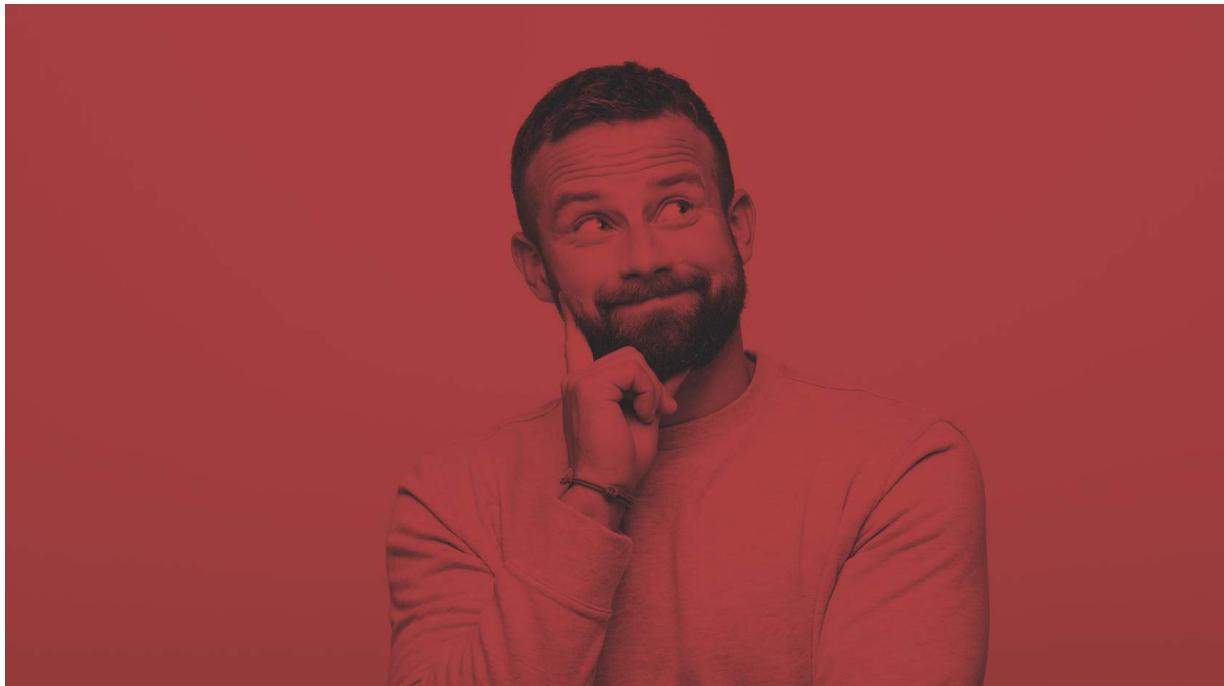
Prospects take notice of someone who asks good questions. It's one of the best ways to build trust. Conversations in which prospects have to explain what they do are boring for them. Conversations that drive new insights are valuable. And engaging.

When a prospect says, "That's a great question," they're indicating some powerful thoughts. First, that you're helping them realize some things they've never said or thought about. Second, that you've established yourself as someone that understands their situation and their reality.

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## **When You Ask Bad Questions**

Bad questions degrade trust. When your prospect spends half an hour explaining what they do, or who their competitors are, they're checked out. They've explained it a hundred times before. Even worse, they're establishing themselves as the authority in the conversation. If they see themselves more knowledgeable than you, they'll never need you as a consultant.



## The Point of Questioning is Listening

Remember, as useful as questions are to your sale, the point is to listen to the answers, and listen well. Consultative questioning works best when paired with active listening techniques.



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## QUESTIONING DESIGN

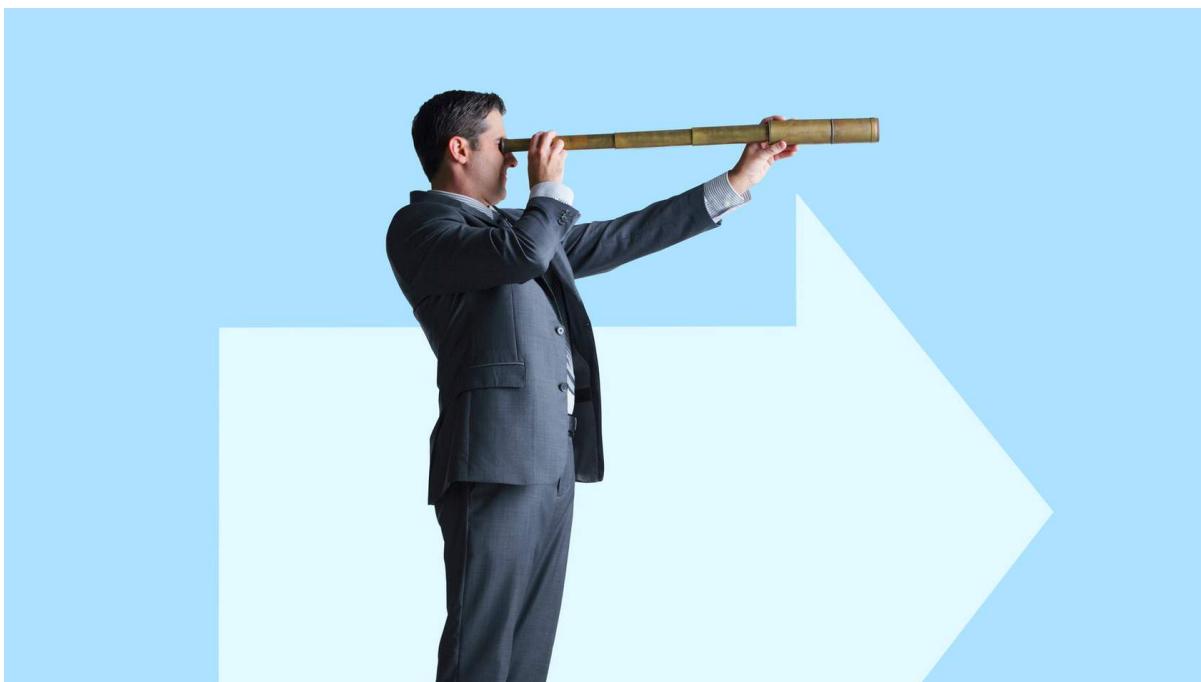
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***How and when you ask can be as important as what you ask.***

Imagine, for a second, that you're an investigative reporter. You need to interview a source that's been rumored to be a corrupt government official. Do you burst into the room, point your finger and demand to know everything about their corrupt actions? If you do, chances are you're getting nowhere. The sales call can feel like that to a prospect if you do it wrong.

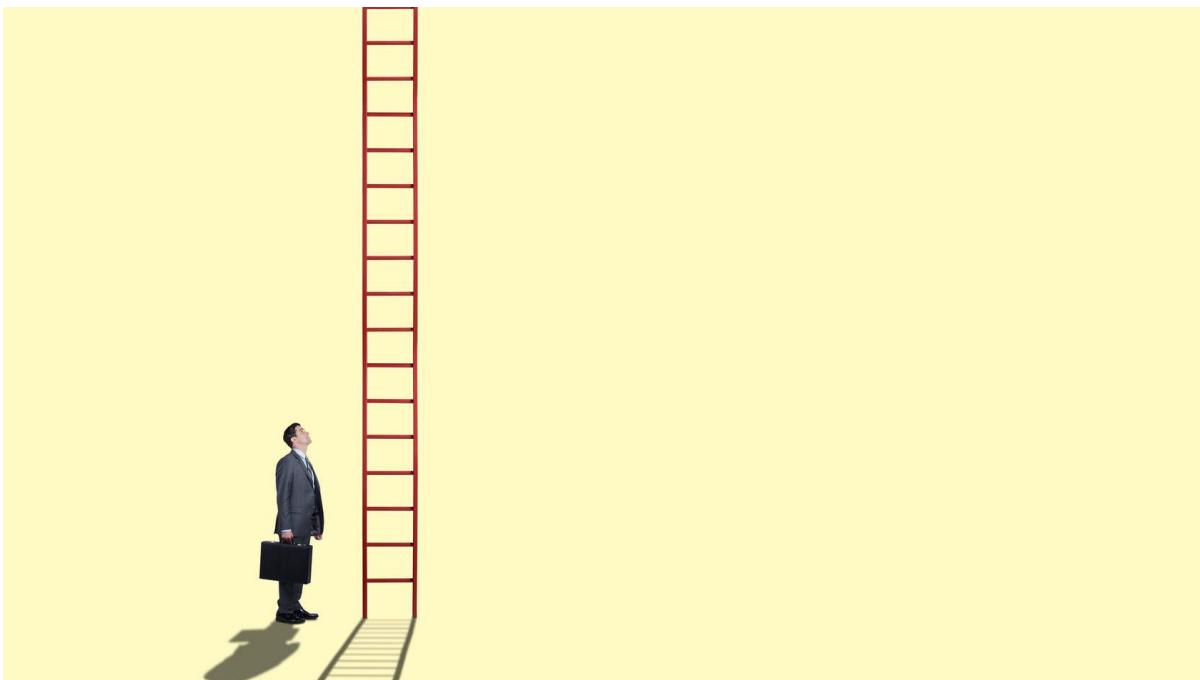
## Build Your Story

The best way to get a prospect to open up is to employ a type of chronological questioning. We call it "Future, Present, Forward."

**FUTURE**

**Start with the future.** Where do they want to be? What does that look like to them?

## PRESENT



Next, **take them to the present**. What's in the way today that will prevent them from achieving that future vision?

## FORWARD



Finally, take them from the present to that vision of the future. Together, **explore their path forward.**

## **Summary**

This will allow you to set the tone and drive the conversion without having to do much talking.

And, it will put the prospect at ease and help you start to build trust.

## **Create Your Questions**

Once you've planned your questions, take a look at what you're asking. Categorize them into the following three categories:

### **DATA QUESTIONS**

These are information points that have definite answers.

Example: "*What are your revenue goals for next year?*"

## **POWERFUL QUESTIONS**

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These are conversation-starters that focus on the important aspects of their business, even though they're usually not urgent aspects.

Example: "*If it's five years from now and you've achieved the goals without addressing this specific problem. How do you think you got there?*"

## **HARD QUESTIONS**

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These questions ask the prospect to do more than think and answer, they require a commitment from the prospect.

Example: "*What will you do when you start getting push-back from the buying committee?*"

Take a look first at your data questions. These can often be re-written into powerful questions or researched on your own. **Avoid data questions as much as possible.** If you must ask them, save them for a 'lightning round' at the end of your conversation before you set next steps.

**Use your powerful questions early on in the conversation.** These will drive the "Future, Present, Forward" technique and build your story.

**Save your hard questions for last.** Prioritize them and assume you'll only ask one or two at most. Gauge your rapport with the prospect to judge how many you can press for.

## **Let's Try It**

**Sort these questions** in to their appropriate category.

DATA QUESTION

**What are your revenue goals  
next year?**

**What is your target profit  
margin?**

**What is your budget?**

**Who is the key decision  
maker?**

POWERFUL QUESTION

**What will success on this project look like for you?**

**How much could a solution like this improve your position?**

**What can you do with all the efficiency created from this solution?**

**What could you do with the savings from this proposal?**

**HARD QUESTION**

**What are you going to address the push-back on this process?**

**How are you going to turn the people that need to get on board?**

**How are you going to find the extra money to achieve this?**

**Are you going to be able to break the relationship with your previous supplier?**



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## OPEN vs. CLOSED QUESTIONS

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### The best questions start conversations.

Questions that allow for short, finite answers don't advance a conversation. Ensure that the questions you ask require some amount of explanation.

While there may be some stats and facts that you need to help tailor your solution to your prospect, this information will usually surface naturally. You'll have the opportunity to discover those types of details through clarifying moments that happen throughout the conversation if needed.

**Open-ended questions** are easy to form if you start with the **right lead-in words**. Try beginning with “**why**” or “**how**” instead of “what.”

From time to time, your prospect will still find a way to deliver a short answer instead of starting a conversation. In those cases, use follow-ups like “Why do you say that?” Or “What else?”

# Knowledge Check

Sort the following questions as either 'Open' or Closed'.

Open

What else?

Where do we go from here?

What would that look like?

Can you tell me more about  
that?

**What would solving this pain  
now look like in five years?**

Closed

**How did I do?**

**How's your mom?**

**Cool?**

**Do you understand?**

**Do you see what I mean?**

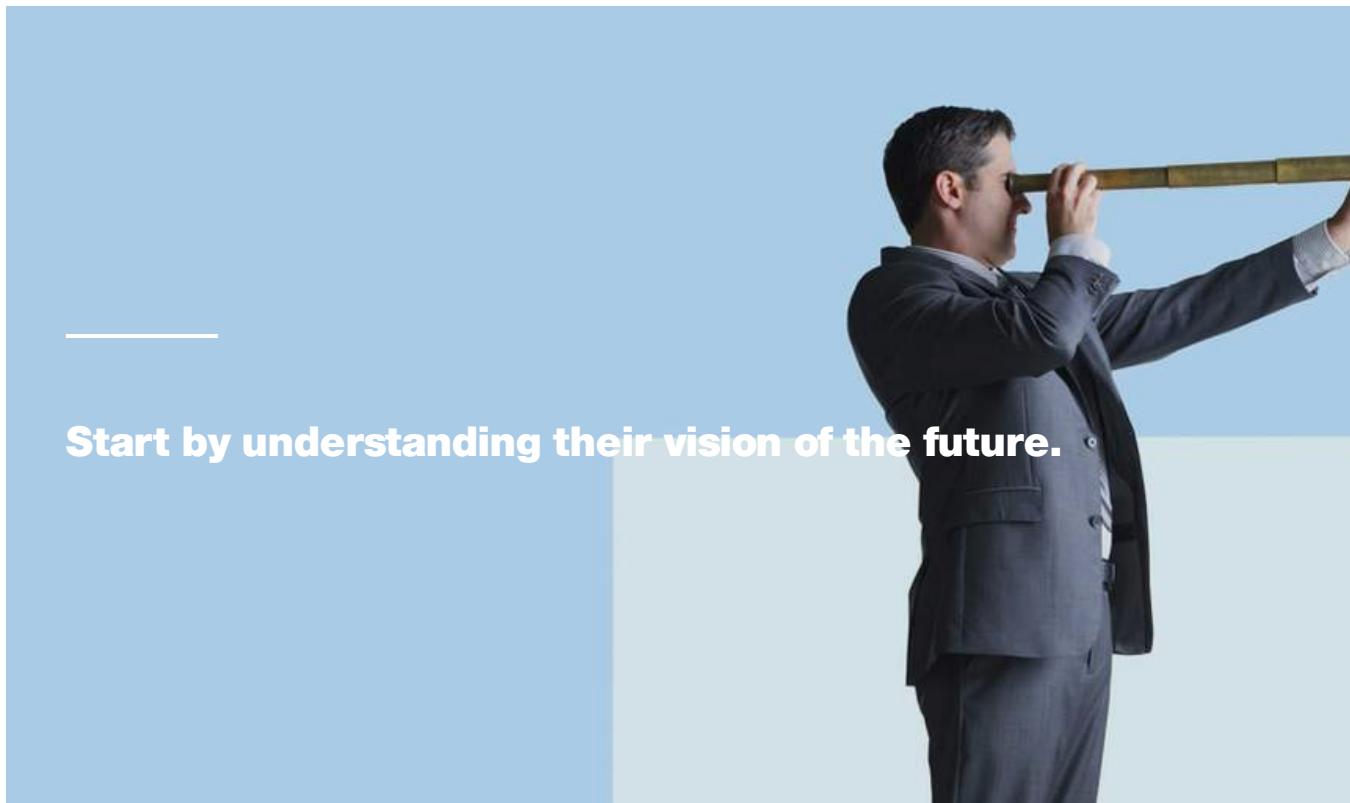
**Is this in your budget?**



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## FUTURE-FRAMING QUESTIONS

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Future-framing questions help set the tone of the meeting by taking the prospect out of the day-to-day. They ask the prospect to create a vision of their own world once their current challenges have been solved. These questions ask about what's possible and probable.

This serves two purposes:

1

First, **it allows you to explore where your prospect wants to be**, so you can start finding their priorities faster.

2

Second, **it helps your prospect tune out the urgent matters that may be in front of them** that would otherwise distract them from the task at hand.

Here are some examples of future-framing questions that you can use to get started:



“What’s the best-case version of your company in five years?

What’s the reasonable expectation?”



“What kind of growth goals do you have right now? Where do you need to be by this day, five years out, to feel like it’s been successful?”



"Imagine we've been working together for a few years, and it's been the absolute best engagement ever. What have we accomplished together in that time?"

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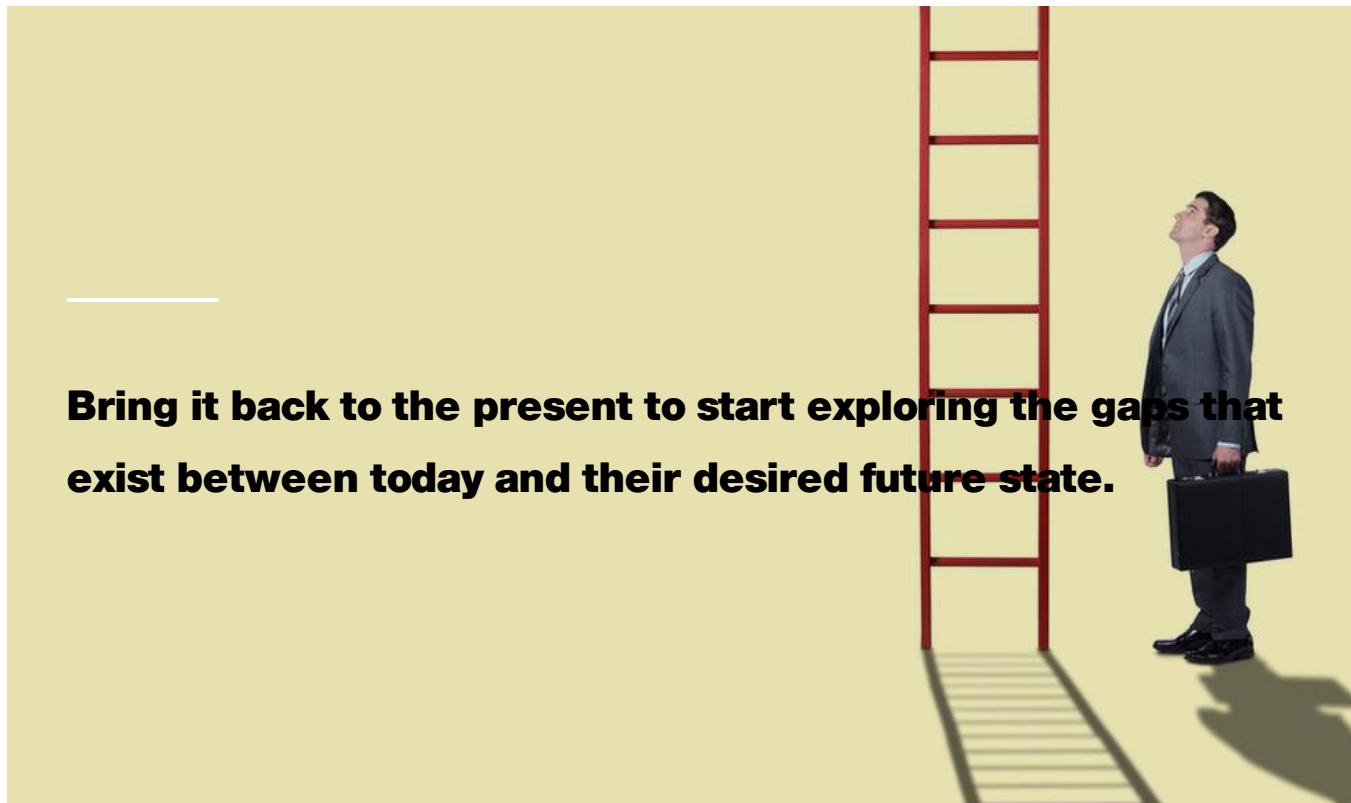
Getting engaged answers from your prospect to questions like these is akin to having them tell you exactly what you need to do to be their best partner. They're giving you the keys to the castle.



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## PRESENT PAIN QUESTIONS

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**Bring it back to the present to start exploring the gaps that exist between today and their desired future state.**

With a vision of the future set, it's time to start exploring the gaps between their vision and where they are today. Frame this with their vision of the future first and ask them to discuss the obstacles and barriers that will prevent them from achieving that vision. Ideally, try not to lead them. But if they're reluctant, you may need to get the conversation rolling.

It's important to understand that many of the gaps the prospect thinks they have may be only half-realized. Leaving open the challenge will help them talk through the barriers they have and may help them better articulate their needs in new ways.

Here are some examples of present pain questions:



**"You talked about wanting to achieve [insert their goal here] earlier. Looking at the business today, what do you think is keeping you from that?"**



**"Thinking about where you are now, what will need to happen between now and then to make that a reality?"**



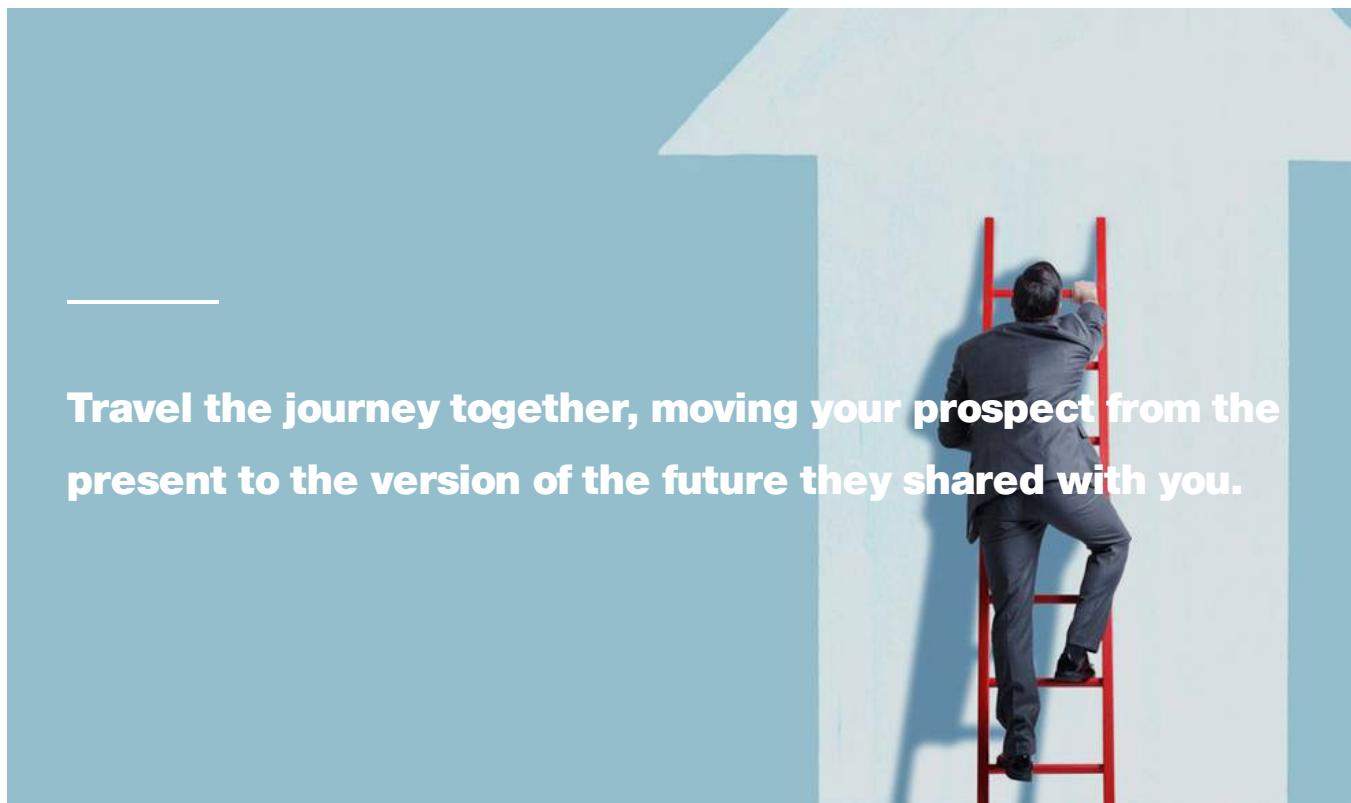
**"What are two or three hurdles you're seeing that could get in the way?"**

Getting engaged answers from your prospect to questions like this will better help you make the gaps and pain real. It may also put you in a position to be able to show them some quicker victories.

CONTINUE

## MOVING FORWARD QUESTIONS

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**Travel the journey together, moving your prospect from the present to the version of the future they shared with you.**

The goal of your moving forward questioning is twofold:

1

Uncover the threats present in your prospect's work.

2

Help them realize the right outcomes of solving their problem.

Uncovering threats with your prospect takes practice. For each gap, it's important to dig deeper. But do it too fast or in too harsh a light, and you'll come off as pushy, nosey, or overly critical. The key is to keep the prospect talking and don't assume too much.

**HOW TO DO IT WELL**

**DON'T DO THIS AT ALL**

**Prospect:** *"It seems like, on every project, I'm having to go back to ask for more budget when we're only about 80 percent of the way done."*

**Seller:** *"Oh, that's not good. What happens because of that?"*

Here, the seller shows empathy and asks an open-ended question that digs deeper.

**HOW TO DO IT WELL**

**DON'T DO THIS AT ALL**

**Prospect:** *"It seems like, on every project, I'm having to go back to ask for more budget when we're only 80 percent of the way done."*

**Seller:** *"That probably puts you in a bad light to management and could ultimately cost you your job, huh?"*

Here, the seller assumes the threat and shoves it in the prospect's face.

In addition to uncovering threats, it's useful to help prospects understand the outcomes that have to happen to meet their goal. You will position your solution as one of those outcomes, one that

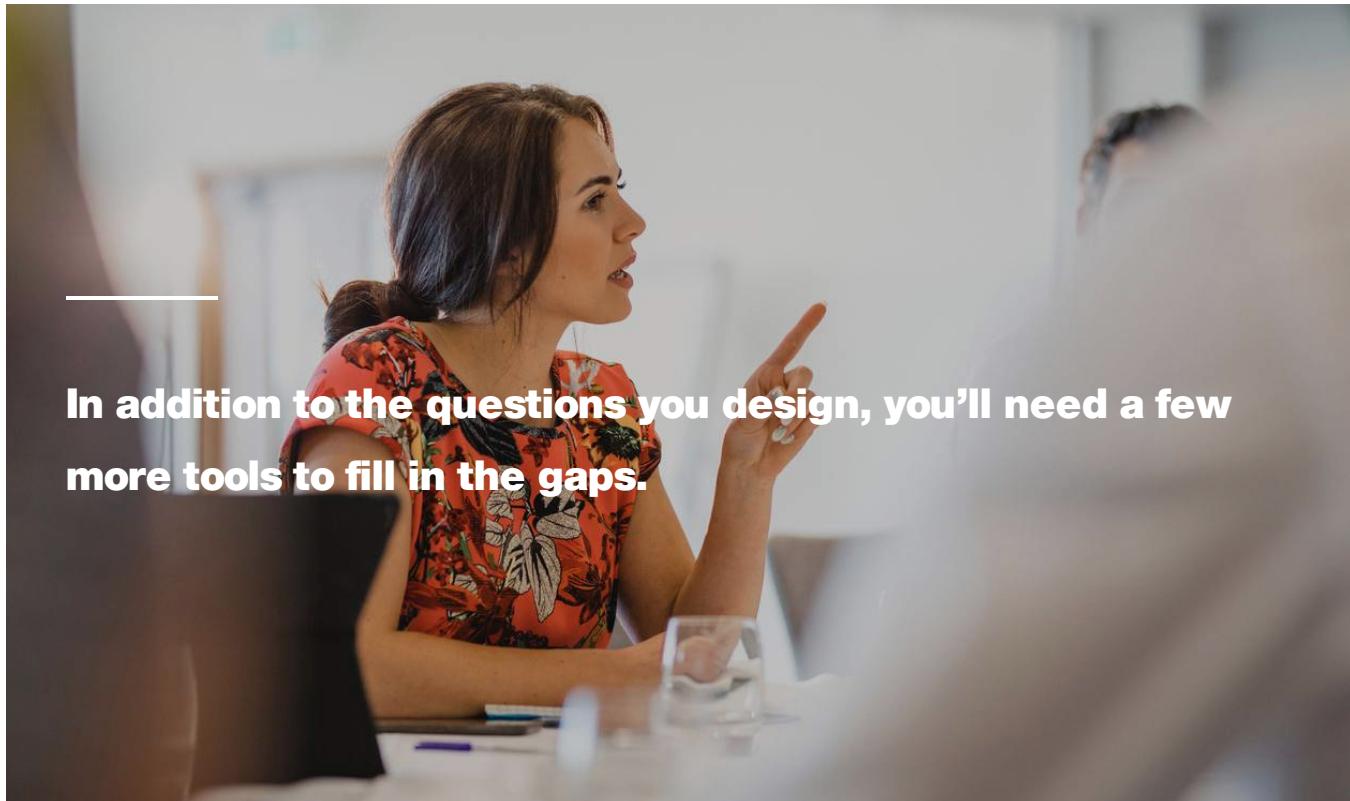
eliminates a threat on the way to achieving their goal.



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## TIPS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

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**In addition to the questions you design, you'll need a few more tools to fill in the gaps.**

Questions are meant to keep the conversation going, but your prospect is in control of how much they say and when. You'll want to use these techniques to keep things going once they think they're done.

**Watch** the videos below for some tips on how to extend the conversation with your prospect.

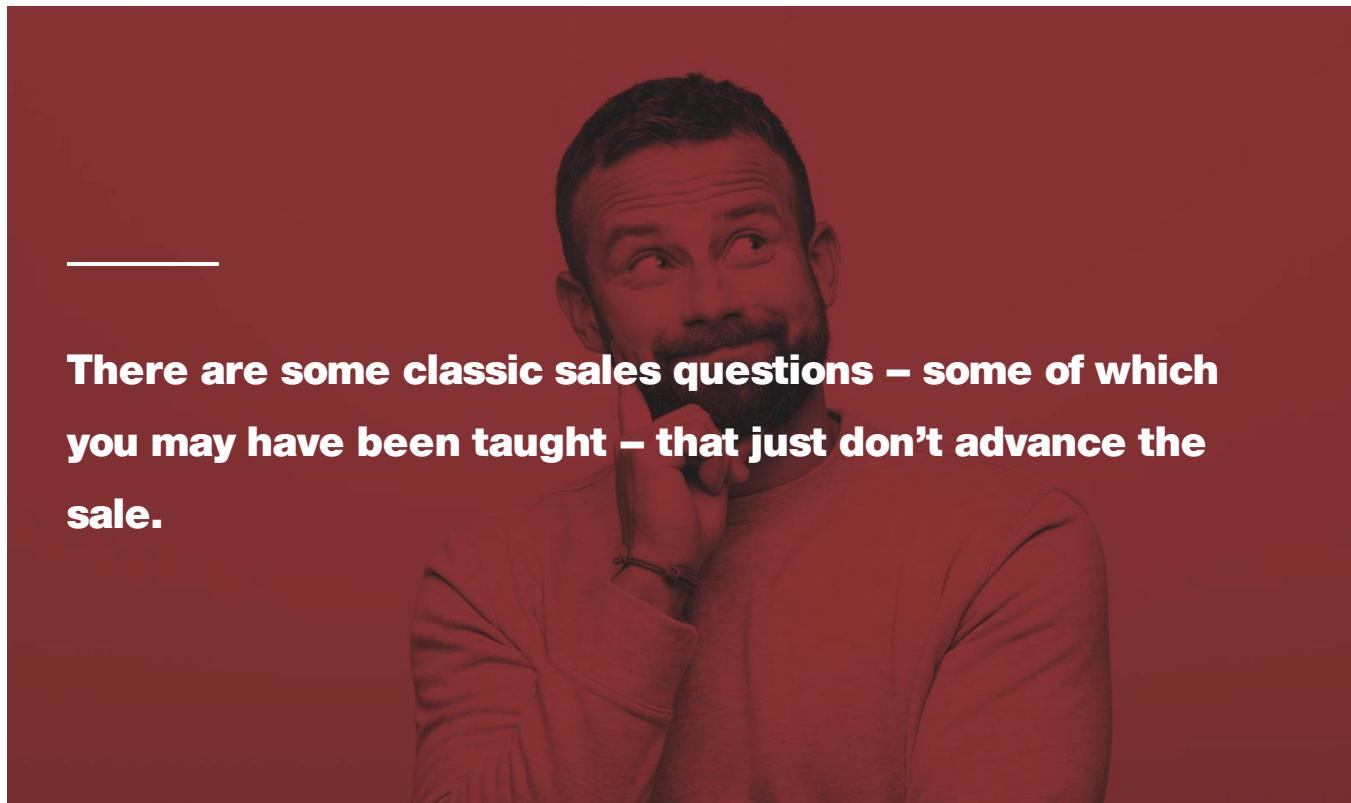


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## QUESTIONS TO AVOID

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**There are some classic sales questions – some of which you may have been taught – that just don't advance the sale.**

**Watch** the video below to learn more about questions to avoid when talking to a prospect.



Complete the content above before moving on.

## SUMMARY

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### Congratulations!

You've successfully completed this course, and your progress has been marked as complete.

### Next Steps

- Download the Consultative Questioning Quick Reference Guide, below.
- Click any lesson title in the menu to review that course content.
- Close your browser tab to exit the course.

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