

Five Keys to Great Questions

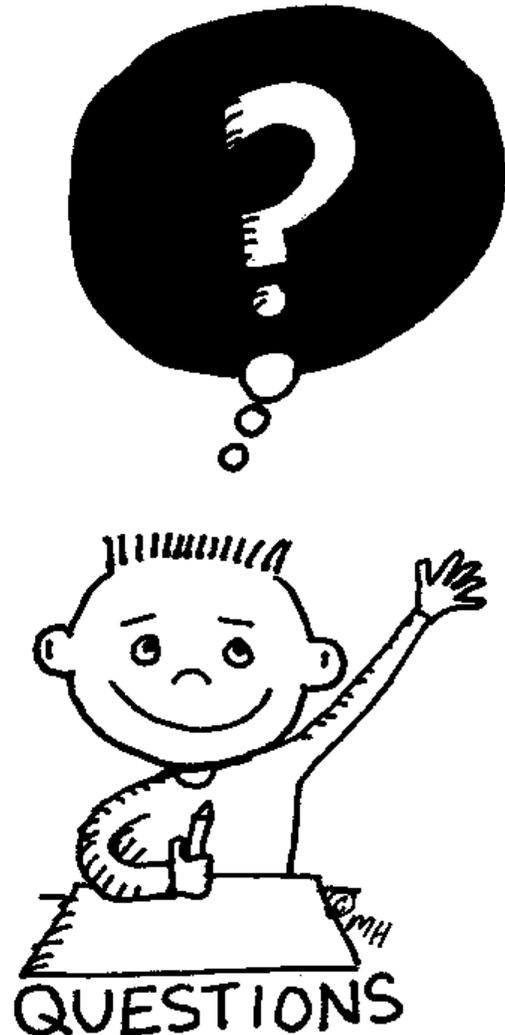
by: Kevin Eikenberry

Sammy was a young and ambitious salesperson. Part of his training had been to spend time with Raima, a veteran and very successful salesperson at the firm. As went on sales calls with Raima he took notes, and one of the things he marveled at was Raima's ability to ask great questions. In fact he had been collecting and recording her questions and had begun using the same questions himself

Sammy was disappointed though, as it seemed that the questions that worked so well for Raima didn't seem to have the same result for him. He was pretty confident his timing was right – he wasn't asking a particular question at an inappropriate time ... so he was confused.

He continued to try and practice for several weeks. Then at the annual sales conference, he decided to see if he could get some additional coaching from Raima. He asked her to have breakfast with him on the second morning the conference. Raima was pleased and quickly said yes; she appreciated Sammy and thought he had a very bright future.

After they had placed their orders, Sammy described his dilemma; he wanted to know Raima's secret for asking questions so successfully. He explained that he felt it wasn't the words themselves – in fact he proved it by showing her over two pages of handwritten questions he had heard her use successfully.



Raima listed intently and smiled. When Sammy was finished, she, not surprisingly, asked a couple of clarifying questions to make sure she understood his situation. Sammy smiled as he noticed her naturally using great questions yet again.

After their food had arrived, Raima sat quietly eating for a couple of minutes, clearly pondering Sammy's queries. As she finished her toast, she said, "I think there are five things that make for great questions beyond the words themselves, Sammy. I've certainly thought about each of these things in the past, but perhaps never as a cohesive set. That's why I took a couple of minutes to collect my thoughts."

Sammy smiled to assure her that he didn't mind. Then he slid his plate away so he could take notes.

When Sammy returned to his room after the full day of Conference activities, he reviewed his notes on Raima's five keys. Here is his summary of those ideas.

Before You Ask The Question

Sammy compiled these ideas as an acrostic so he wouldn't forget – remember to put your questions on ICE . . .

1 **Intent** – The intent of your question is as important as anything. This intent will guide the overall success with your question. In fact, if your intent is genuine, pure and sincere, it will allow even the clumsiest question to be successful. Regardless of the situation, consider why you are asking a particular question. If the question is meant to gain knowledge, help the other person, allow them to express themselves or in some other way be a step in serving them, your question will be more powerful.

2 **Curiosity** - When we are genuinely curious about the answer to our question we will ask better questions. Sometimes people ask a question in a perfunctory way, or they ask even though they already assume they know the answer. When we ask our questions from genuine curiosity, they will be more successful and effective.

3 **Expectancy** – Ask questions expecting to get an answer, and expecting to get a valuable answer! When we ask our questions with a positive expectancy, we will ask much better questions.

After The Question is Asked

Sammy realized that the other two ideas on his list come after the question has been asked. Raima's advice for this critical time was:

4 **Care About the Answer** – While it may seem obvious, in reflecting on this point, he realized that when you have the ICE components before your question, you are in a much better position to truly care about the answer you receive. Raima reminded him that the question itself is only a vehicle to get to the answer – and so truly caring about the answer is a huge key to successful questions.

5 **Listen** – The last item on Sammy's list was something he knew Raima did well. Raima truly listened to the responses to her questions. Of course Sammy knew that listening was important – everyone does, right – but as he reviewed the other four keys he realized that they all led up to and supported successful listening.

As Sammy reviewed some of his recent sales calls he realized that his intense focus on asking the right question had diverted him from these five ideas and that these considerations before and after the question itself would be the key to greater success.

These keys aren't just for Sammy – but for everyone, in any interaction where you ask questions. Use these keys and you will unlock even greater power in your questions.