



50

**POWERFUL
SALES
QUESTIONS**



RAIN Group



ASKING INCISIVE SALES QUESTIONS IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

Great sales questions help you find out what's going on in your buyer's world. They help you connect with buyers, understand their needs, understand what's important to them, and help them create better futures for themselves.

They help you disrupt buyer thinking and change buyers' perception of what's true and what's possible.

They help you drive the sale forward and avoid pitfalls that can derail the sale along the way.

Great sales questions help you win sales.

In this guide we share 50 of the most powerful sales questions you can use in your conversations. These questions are broken down into groupings following our [RAIN SellingSM framework](#) for leading sales conversations—Rapport, Aspirations and Afflictions, Impact, and New Reality. We also include questions for insight selling that you can use to get buyers to think differently, and questions to help you drive the sales process forward.

Lastly, we include two important categories of questions: closed-ended questions, which are rarely talked about in sales but can be very useful, and your power boosters, follow-up questions.



DEVELOP RAPPORT

Before buyers will open up to you about their needs and desires, they have to be comfortable with you.

Comfort (and trust) begin with rapport.

Building rapport is sometimes dismissed as a ploy to make a superficial connection with a buyer. You shouldn't make superficial connections, you should make genuine ones. Genuine rapport sets the table for the rest of the conversation.

Here are 7 sales questions to help build rapport.

1. What did you do last weekend?

Questions about off-work activities give you insight into what actually matters to your buyer. You'll learn about kids, pets, hobbies, passion projects, and more. People appreciate it when you ask about these things during subsequent conversations, too.

2. What's going on in your business these days?

Asking about business in general seems broad, but buyers will often rattle off a few things that are most important to them, giving you ideas for cross-selling and up-selling later. It also shows buyers that you're curious and want to know what's going on beyond your particular sale.

3. How have things in your business changed given [insert an industry event]?

Industry-impact questions demonstrate your familiarity with and interest in the buyer's business beyond simply stating, "Yes, we've worked in [industry]."

4. It was good to hear the short version of your background at the meeting, but since we're out for lunch, I'd love to get the long version. What's your story?

People love talking about themselves. If you've already done the 20,000-foot-overview talk, asking for more details shows you're truly interested in learning more (but only if you do it genuinely).

5. I have to say, I really like the way you don't just have your values up on the wall like every company, but you have all the comments from your team about what the values mean to them. How did you all come up with that? I'm guessing you learned a lot about your company and team. Thoughts?

Knowing your buyer's leadership style and more about the company's culture will give you a better idea of how to communicate with the team during the sales process and when you start working with them. It also shows that you're attentive and genuinely interested in them. This is just an example—the idea is to ask about something that truly intrigues you.

6. You mentioned you want to retire in a few years. What are you thinking of doing then?

Like the weekend question, a question about the buyer's future will help you understand what's important to them and what they're passionate about when they're not working. It will help you relate on a personal level and find common ground. After all, people buy from people they like.

7. What were you doing before you were at this company?

Your buyer's career path may come in handy because it will give you a sense of where they've been and where they're headed. In some cases, you may discover that a buyer pivoted in their career, which is a great opportunity to ask more questions.



Click to learn more about how to build rapport with buyers →



DISCOVER ASPIRATIONS & AFFLICTIONS

Most sales advice suggests that you must first uncover the “problem” or “pain”—afflictions—to sell products and services as solutions to needs.

This advice too often drives sellers to employ find-out-what’s-wrong-and-fix-it thinking.

The sellers most successful at creating opportunities also focus on the positives—the buyer’s goals, aspirations, and possibilities the buyer doesn’t even know exist.

You must ask questions that uncover both aspirations and afflictions. Here are 10 such questions.

8. If, at the end of this hour, you looked back and thought ‘that was an hour well spent’ what would we have covered?

What better way to run a meeting than to make sure you cover exactly what matters to the buyer? Plus, this question gets to aspirations and afflictions for the meeting, which ensures you’re not only focusing on pain points.

9. Why isn’t this particular technology/service/product/situation/issue working for you right now?

Many buyers are willing to talk to sellers because something they’re doing or using right now isn’t working for them. It’s important to know what you’re up against.

10. Many of our clients report problems with A, B, and C. How are these areas affecting you? What do you think about them?

This is another great way to establish expertise and industry credibility. It also asks the buyer to think about their challenges in a different way or consider challenges they hadn’t identified previously. The idea is to ask specific open-ended questions that show you know the area well.

11. What's holding you back from reaching your revenue (or profit, or other) goals?

Learning about obstacles early in the conversation is imperative. If the buyer believes an obstacle is insurmountable, it's up to you to show them why it's not and how to get past it.

12. What goals and objectives do you have in general for your business? For this particular area?

Finding out about your buyer's hopes, goals, and aspirations allows you to focus on the positives during your conversations and uncover needs the buyer hadn't previously considered but should.

13. (Assuming they set the meeting) Why did you ask me to talk with you today?

You may already know why the buyer set the meeting, but it doesn't hurt to revisit the question to make sure you're on the same page. It's also possible there have been developments since the meeting was set, so it's useful to see if there are any updates.

14. (Assuming you set the meeting) As I mentioned earlier, I'd like to share a few ideas that have helped our clients succeed in the X, Y, and Z areas. Before we get going, by the time we're done with this meeting, what else might you like to cover?

It's possible the buyer had something else in mind when they accepted the meeting with you beyond your intentions. This is a good way to check in before you start talking to ensure the meeting is as valuable as possible.

15. What's your sense of what needs to happen to improve that/make progress here/change that?

Knowing your buyer's perspective on the situation and how they think it can be addressed will give you an idea of things like company culture, how receptive they'll be to your ideas, how to frame your solution/service/product, etc.

16. What kind of opportunities do you see for improvement in this area?

This is a great question to uncover both aspirations and afflictions. By getting the buyer to articulate the opportunities for improvement, they are likely to talk about both the problems they have in this area (afflictions) and their vision for what it could be like (aspirations).

17. What have you done in the past to address this issue/try to reach this goal?

As you're formulating your solution, you don't want to suggest something the buyer has already tried and failed. You either want to build onto what they're doing or change it altogether, neither of which you can do without this question.



[Click here to find out what ONE thing will double your sales opportunities →](#)



DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

You must demonstrate to the buyer how working with you is going to improve their world. What are the personal implications? Business ones? Help the buyer see the impact of your work together.

18. If you could overcome these challenges, what would happen to your company's financial situation?

You need to get the buyer to quantify the impact of working with you. It's one thing to tell the buyer that, on average, you're able to save your clients \$250,000 in operating costs. It's another for them to do the calculation themselves and see the impact on their business.

19. If you were to make this happen what would it mean for you personally?

The more of a stake the buyer has in seeing the results realized, the more buy-in you'll get, and the more likely the buyer is to support you internally. Beyond financial impact, you want to help the buyer look good. For example, maybe your project will help the buyer get the promotion they want.

20. How would implementing these changes affect your competitiveness in the market?

Maybe your project will help the company grow market share, become more profitable than competitors, or be more innovative in their market. Whatever it is, you need your buyer to articulate how working with you will give them a leg up over their competition.

21. What won't happen if you chose not to move forward with this?

When urgency to move forward is an issue, ask what won't happen. The buyer likely already knows what won't happen, but saying it aloud to you makes it more real. You don't want to scare the buyer, but creating fuel for action can be helpful.

22. How do you think the board of directors would evaluate the success of this initiative?

Knowing the metrics by which your work will be judged is the first step to success. By knowing these ahead of time, you're able to put systems in place to track them from the get-go.

23. If you don't solve [insert the challenge here], what kind of difficulties will you face going forward?

Again, looking at the cost of inaction can create fuel for moving forward. This question is also helpful as buyers start trying to piecemeal your product/solution.



[Click here for 6 ways to communicate impact in your sales conversations →](#)



DEFINE THE NEW REALITY

One of the greatest difficulties in sales is helping the buyer understand exactly what they get when they work with you. You need to paint a compelling before-and-after picture of what you will achieve by working together.

You can only do this when you know what's truly important to the buyer, which is going to be different for each one.

Here are 8 questions to help you uncover what's important to the buyer so you can paint the most compelling picture of their new reality.

24. If you were to wave a magic wand to make it 3 years from now and this all works out, how will things be different?

Your part of an organization's 3-year plan is likely a small one, but getting the whole picture will both get your buyer excited about the possibilities and help you see where else you might work together.

25. (In early sales discussion) You mentioned you're not having a good experience with your current provider. If you work with us, what are you hoping will be different?

Especially in your efforts to unseat an incumbent, you want to know what's not working now to formulate a plan to be different/better. This will also give you an indication of the buyer's expectations.

26. (In later sales discussions) Given all we've talked about, what do you see as being different if we were to move forward together?

This question gets the buyer thinking about change and envisioning the future possibilities.

27. What does success look like for you, personally?

Having the buyer vocalize how the success of the project would impact their personal life and/or career creates excitement and generates additional buy-in. After all, people buy with their hearts and justify with their heads. You need to appeal to both.

28. What does success look like for your business?

It's important to know how buyers are going to evaluate the success of your initiative. In painting your picture of the new reality, you need to clearly define what that end goal looks like for their business, for them personally, for the project, and for your relationship working together. Don't make assumptions here. Get the buyer to articulate their future state both from a rational and emotional standpoint. This question, and the next few, help buyers articulate this vision.

29. What does success look like for this project?

Establishing success metrics is important before you start, but you also want to make sure your buyer has realistic expectations for the results you can achieve.

30. What does success look like for us working together?

Your primary contact is most frequently your Champion—the person who will help you navigate their organization and push the initiative forward. Establishing a strong relationship with them is essential for success.

31. If there were no restriction on you—money, effort, political issues, and so on—what would you change? Can you tell me why you say that?

A question like this indicates what's most important to the buyer in this situation and gives you an opportunity to help them get there even with the stated obstacles in the way.



[Click here to get 3 steps for communicating your value to buyers →](#)



GENERATE INSIGHTS

Powerful sales questions can also be used to disrupt buyer thinking and to get them thinking differently. We call this insight selling.

Many people think insight selling is about educating buyers through presentations. They're about half right, but without the other half, they're missing out on the full impact of insight selling.

The missing link is asking insightful questions that disrupt buyer thinking. If you can change a buyer's perception of what's true and what's possible, you can influence their agenda for action.

Here are 8 powerful questions for insight selling success.

32. Why? (Why is that your strategy? Why do you say that? Why do A vs. B?)

By asking why, you are asking buyers to justify something. If they can do so convincingly, good for them! But oftentimes they can't. This opens up an opportunity for you to help.

33. How? (How do you see this panning out? How do you think you need to proceed so this becomes a part of the culture? How might you avoid the common challenges like X, Y, and Z?)

"How" questions help the buyer start thinking about the new reality. Sometimes they have strong reasoning for why to do something, but they don't have a strong plan for how to get it done. When you help buyers think about the how, it helps them avoid problems and develop plans that will make everything work better. How questions can be very powerful for generating insight.

34. What have you tried that hasn't worked?

This question will help you understand their thinking and help you see the gaps between what they know won't work and what you know will.

35. Have you considered A, B, C, etc.? If not, why not?

You may find out they did, but did not approach it right, or didn't know about a new advancement in the area. Maybe they didn't know better options existed. You can bring them to the table.

36. If I said I believe you might have under-invested to achieve this outcome in the past, what would you say?

When many buyers try to do something the first time, they look to cheaper options. Then those cheaper options fail. This kind of question can push buyers out of their comfort zones. They might say, "Well, what should I have done?" Or, "The ROI wasn't worth spending more." Most answers give you opportunity to bring insight to the table.

37. What do you think is possible? What's possible for action? What's possible for solution choices?

Whatever you find here gives you the chance to alter the buyer's perception.

38. How do you know that?

Here you are testing the buyer's assumptions. This can be tricky, but thinking critically together helps to broaden their perspective and consider other possibilities.

39. What do you think is missing?

Once you open the buyer's mind to other possibilities, questions like this may spark additional ideas or considerations.



[Click here to find out how using insights in sales conversations can propel your results to the next level →](#)



USE CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

Much sales advice tells you to avoid using closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions have a time and place and can be very powerful.

Closed-ended questions can be great for diagnosis and ruling things out. After any closed-ended question, use one of the follow-up questions to get the prospect to continue talking.

40. Would you say all of your customer service reps are using the technology to its full ability?

This question is all about finding holes in the buyer's operational processes and isn't limited to reps and tech. Replace with "project managers" and "building materials" and you have a different conversation with a different buyer.

41. Should your team be doing more of X?

Similar to many of the questions in this area, if they say yes, you can explore this further. If they say no, you can do the same. Push the buyer with questions that get them to question their initial response.

42. Do you think you're doing all you can in [insert area]?

Maybe they are. Maybe they aren't. But this question coupled with a follow-up question will challenge them to deeply consider their efforts.

43. Do you think [insert area] is a problem for you?

If they say yes, you can explore. If they say no, same thing. You can push them with questions that get them to question their initial response. As the expert, you've seen what problems other companies in their space have. This question both establishes you as knowledgeable about their industry and exposes potential pitfalls.

PERSISTENCE HELPS YOU DIG DEEPER

Follow-up questions provide a power boost to your sales questioning. These three questions alone can instantly uncover a remarkable amount of valuable information.

44. How so?

Understanding the buyer's perception of a situation will not only give you further insight into how to address it, but also a glimpse of the buyer's thought process.

45. Can you tell me a little more about that?

Whether you don't understand, want to know more, or think there's an opportunity in this area, digging a little deeper will give you the clarity you need.

46. Why?

Yes, this is listed twice (see #32). Asking "why" a few more times can open the door for new insights as you get to the underlying cause of the problem. This allows you to create a better, more durable solution.



Why is "why" so powerful in sales conversations? [Click here to find out →](#)



DON'T STOP THERE

There are four kinds of sales questions: problem and possibility, process, perception, and page. We've already covered problem and possibility. To win sales, you also need to know what the buying process is, what the buyer's perceptions are, and whether or not you're on the same page.

47. (Process Question) If we got to point where we move forward together, who on your side would need to be involved to make sure we can get this project underway?

If your contact isn't a decision maker, or is only one of a team, this is where you find out who the other players are and work on getting in front of them.

48. (Page Question) We just covered X, Y, and Z over the last 15 minutes. To summarize the key points [insert summary here]. Did I capture the essence right or am I missing anything?

This is a good practice for any meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page, but is especially important in sales to confirm you understand the buyer's situation correctly.

49. (Perception Question) Just checking in as we've been working on this for a few weeks now. How are you feeling about how things are going? Are we on the right track?

While you may think things are going smoothly, the buyer may have a different idea of how things are going right or wrong. Asking this regularly allows you to stay on the right track or course correct if necessary.

50. (Perception Question) Is there anything not sitting well with you? With our process, our offering, how we're interacting... anything that gives you pause about moving forward.

Again, this will give you an idea of the buyer's perception of how things are going, but also may uncover hidden objections.



THE BEST CONVERSATIONS BALANCE ADVOCACY & INQUIRY

Sometimes all you need is to ask one question and the buyer will share all the information you need to help them. More often, you need to make several lines of inquiry. Don't overdo it, though. You don't want to make your buyers feel as if they are on the witness stand.

While this guide is about asking questions, don't forget that the most powerful sales conversations tend to balance inquiry (asking questions) with advocacy (talking, educating, giving advice).

Coupled with strong advocacy, thoughtful inquiry will help you connect with buyers, uncover needs and opportunities, communicate the impact, and demonstrate your value by pushing back and getting buyers to think in new ways.

These are all essential elements to winning sales consistently.

Lead Masterful Sales Conversations with RAIN SellingSM Training

Sales are won and lost based on the conversations sellers have with buyers.

RAIN Selling: Foundations of Consultative Selling will teach your team a proven process for leading masterful sales conversations. This program introduces the strategies and tactics that are the foundation of successful selling.

In the RAIN Selling program, your team will learn how to:

- Lead masterful sales conversations from beginning to end
- Use questioning techniques to uncover the full set of buyer needs and desires
- Sell ideas, insights, and perspectives that influence the buyer's agenda and inspire buyer action
- Understand buyers, buyer types, and the buying process
- Overcome objections that get in the way of the sale
- Sell on value and reduce price push backs
- Avoid common mistakes that even the most experienced sellers make



of companies do not believe their sellers have the core consultative selling skills they need to consistently find and win business.

RAIN Selling gives your team the core consultative selling skills they need to develop relationships, uncover needs, craft compelling solutions, and inspire buyers with new ideas and insights.

"A lot of other sales training companies tend to be generalists. RAIN Group's knowledge of our industry makes them very effective at understanding our needs and then helping us in a more focused way. Within 10 months [of implementing RAIN Selling], we've increased the number of active clients by nearly one-third and we've significantly increased our penetration and revenue in existing accounts."

- Terry Spratz, Vice President & General Manager, Maetrics

Contact Us to Transform Your Team

If your team needs to learn to:

- Uncover the full set of buyer needs to sell a broader solution set
- Sell based on value
- Lead masterful conversations to win more sales

Contact RAIN Group today at 508-405-0438 or info@raingroup.com.

About RAIN Group

Unleash the Sales Potential of Your Team with RAIN Group

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 73 countries increase their sales significantly with RAIN Group's consulting and sales methodology.

Implement Sales Training that Delivers Real Results

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales and negotiation skills, and maximize your results.

Grow Your Key Accounts

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value—and thus sell more—to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

Identify Who Can and Will Sell with Great Success

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

Implement World-Class Sales Coaching

We coach sellers, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting raingroup.com or calling (508) 405-0438.

RAIN Group's Clients

Agilysys..

BDO



TOYOTA

CONVERGYS

HITACHI
Inspire the Next

LEE HECHT
HARRISON

OPTUS

Monitor
Deloitte.

Global Locations

Boston - Bogotá - Geneva - Johannesburg
London - Mumbai - Seoul - Sydney - Toronto

Connect with Us



Guide Contributors

Mike Schultz, President, RAIN Group

Erica Stritch, Vice President, RAIN Group

Beth McCluskey, Director of Marketing, RAIN Group