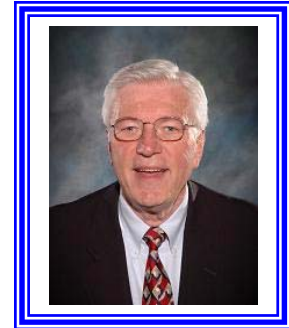


# LOADED QUESTIONS

By Conrad Elnes,  
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Your response to a loaded question is often the silent killer of a sale. Review past sales that seemed ready to close and then silently slipped away, and you are likely to discover that your answer to a single loaded question provided accurate information while the buyer wanted an entirely different response. Discuss the learning points in this Topic at a sales meeting and you will help prevent future lost sales. Enjoy!



## THE ISSUE: LOADED QUESTIONS

When buyers ask questions, they expect salespeople to give them immediate, straight-forward, honest answers based on in-depth product knowledge and company policies. Right?

### WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

More than 70 percent of buyer questions are loaded, i. e. an issue that isn't readily apparent is motivating the buyer to ask. If your salespeople provide accurate information to the four types of questions that are loaded, buyers may perceive the answer as the wrong response. Sale is dead. You're OUT!

## THE SOLUTION: LEARN SAFE RESPONSES TO LOADED QUESTIONS

*Reciprocators* and *Hidden Objection* questions are among the most dangerous sales killers. The buyer's purpose is not to learn accurate information, but rather to signal his/her *Telling Tension* - the compelling desire to talk about themselves! Let's examine in detail both of these questions and the safest response.

When people ask *Reciprocator* questions, they hope that you'll "reciprocate," by asking them a similar question, thus providing them an excuse to talk. How might you respond to these examples?

- "How is business for your firm?"
- "How do you feel about the new safety procedures we have to implement?"
- "How is your son, Todd, doing in school?"

It's a safe bet the askers will have a lot to say if you give them empathetic feedback and ask a question that allows them to elaborate on their own ideas. They don't care much about your thoughts.

Less assertive people often ask a question to indicate a *Hidden Objection* or *Complaint*. The signal words *all*, *only*, or *have to* indicate the buyer seeks an option different from the one you recommended. Negative contractions are also signals.

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*Don't, can't, aren't,* and similar words contained within a question are clear indications of an objection or complaint, and the asker has Telling Tension - the desire to elaborate on the issue.

**NOTE:** Your best response is to give empathetic feedback and ask a question that allows them to reduce their compelling need to talk as they more fully describe their concern. Do you hear the hidden agenda in these questions?

- "Do I have to submit my request in writing?"
- "Do you need all of us to work overtime on the project."
- "Do you have only two years experience with projects like mine?"
- "Can't you complete the install by Friday?"

How would you respond to each?

**Informational** questions are the only questions that aren't loaded. When you're asked a question that is clearly straight forward, answer it by supplying the information requested and then move on. Example:

Customer: "Can you fax the form to me?"

You: "Yes, I'll be happy to do that now."

Occasionally someone may ask an **Opinion Seeking** question. Buyer: "I see advantages in each of these systems you have shown me. Which one do you think I should buy?"

Opinion-Seeking questions can indicate the asker's lack of confidence to make the decision and their desire that someone else accept the responsibility. If you answer directly and the advice turns out to be wrong, it may be held against you. Since many of the choices are personal in nature, your recommendation may be inappropriate for the asker. Also, some people may have pre-determined opinions and ask a question only to see if you give the "right" answer. Your failure to answer correctly becomes a barrier to securing the sale.

The safest answer is empathetic feedback and probe as this example illustrates (In response to the buyer question above).

SALESPERSON: "Joe, the Model 12 is faster, but the model 15 is more reliable. Which do you need most - speed or reliability?"

**Hypothetical** questions may indicate a desire to conclude a purchase. They are often "Buying Signals," and they are phrased as: "If I . . . , will you . . . ?"

For example, imagine that a business executive and a sales person have been in a prolonged discussion about purchasing a new product. As the executive fully realizes the benefits he/she will enjoy, he may indicate a desire to conclude the purchase with

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this question: "**If I** place an order today, **will you** guarantee delivery by the end of the month?"

Salespeople often respond like this: "Yes I can, but let me tell you about another valuable feature . . ." Is that a good answer, or is this a better one? "Joe, we have the system you want in stock. Would you like to have it delivered on the 29th or is the 30th better for you?"

Obviously, the second response closes the sale, and the first one does not. The second response also follows the safety model of empathetic feedback and probe.

## CONCLUSION:

Often, people who ask questions are disclosing their own desire to talk. You delight them and convert them into allies when you respond empathetically, and then ask a question that allows them to continue. The additional knowledge you gain by listening to their elaboration will help you formulate satisfying solutions for them. Delighted customers become your allies who work to see that you get selected time-after-time.

## MY OFFER TO YOU:

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