

How to Structure a Sales Conversation

As you prepare for sales conversations, use the following seven steps as a rough guide. Remember to allow flexibility to follow your curiosity and explore issues the customer raises.

1. Small talk to build rapport

Start the conversation with topics that most people find easy to discuss, such as traffic, the weather, the meeting space, or a news story of mutual interest. Avoid topics that could be controversial, such as religion or politics.

2. Questions to uncover the prospect's needs and buying constraints

Engage the customer in open-ended questions that allow them to define the problem. For instance, you might ask:

- What's your biggest challenge right now?
- Who else is affected by it?
- How are you tackling it?
- How well is that solution working for you?
- If you could wave a magic wand and make the challenge go away, what would that look like?

You'll also want to ask questions concerning the budget and decision-making process. For example:

- What kind of budget do you have to work with?
- How high a priority is the problem for you (or for your organization)?
- Who else will be involved in deciding how best to solve the problem?

3. Transition from describing the problem to exploring solutions

Invite the customer to imagine what the ideal solution to their problem would do for them. Allow them space to explore what that solution could look like.

At this stage, you might want to ask for permission to offer your solution. For example:

- Would you like to hear how our product helps in situations like yours?
- Would you like to hear how we solve that problem?

4. Your offer

Clearly, concisely describe your solution and the benefits it delivers. Wherever possible, echo the language the customer has used to describe the problem and their ideal solution.

At this stage, you may want to pull out a piece of printed collateral (marketing material), such as a one-pager giving an overview of your product or service. Or if you have been invited to give a sales presentation, this is the point when you might walk your audience through a few slides.

As you present your offer, try to anticipate questions and objections. Also invite them—because the more engaged the customer becomes in the conversation, the more likely you are to land the sale.

5. Answers to the prospect's questions and objections

Be honest as you respond to questions. Authenticity is the key to building lasting business relationships.

At the same time, be ready to point the customer toward the sliver lining of an apparent drawback. For example, if the customer raises doubts about the price, speak to the quality of your product.

6. Closing

To get a sale, you need to ask for it. You can do this without being pushy. For example, you might use one of the following questions:

- Would you like to place an order?
- Would you like to get started?
- Should we talk about implementation?
- Would you like our help?
- It seems like this product is a great fit for you. What do you think?
- Why don't you give this a try?
- Are you ready to move forward?
- When do you expect to be able to make a decision?
- Would you like to do business with us?

If you don't succeed in getting the sale, make sure you understand why your product is not a good fit for the customer and the situation. Make the sales call a valuable learning experience.

Also remember that a "no" today is not necessarily a "no" tomorrow. If the problem is not a priority or if there are budget constraints, ask when it would be appropriate for you to check in with the prospect again.

7. Follow-up

Be sure to follow up on your live conversation with a written message thanking the prospect for their time and confirming next steps.

Whether you send a handwritten note or an email message, avoid canned language. To make your thank-you sound genuine, include the following:

- Thank you for the meeting
- Something specific you appreciated about the conversation
- If appropriate, answers to objections the customer raised
- Next steps

Here's an example of a short email thank-you:

SUBJECT: Thanks for a great conversation

Hi Lyle,

Thanks so much for taking the time to chat yesterday about your family's desire to eat more home-cooked meals. I'm still chuckling over the story you told about Amy craving homemade chicken soup for a bedtime snack.

As you requested, I double-checked with the pasta-maker who provides our gluten-free noodles, and they are also corn-free.

I'll drop off a free sample of our Homestyle Chicken Noodle and Marvellous Minestrone within the week so your can try the product. I look forward to hearing Amy's reviews in particular!

Regards,

Stan

Turn the page to create a sales script using a flexible template.

Sales Script Template

1. Small talk to build rapport

Greeting:

Topic for small talk:

2. Questions to uncover the prospect's need and buying constraints

Key questions to ask to explore the problem:

Key questions to ask to explore buying constraints:

3. Transition from describing the problem to exploring solutions

How you will set the stage for presenting your offer:

4. Your offer

Overview of your product:

Benefits of most value to the customer:

Anticipated objections (and responses):

5. Answers to the prospect's questions and objections

FAQs:

Common objections:

Silver linings (reframing of potential drawbacks as benefits):

6. Closing

Potential closing questions you feel confident saying:

7. Follow-up

Thank you for the meeting:

Something specific you appreciated about the conversation:

If appropriate, answers to objections the customer raised:

Next steps: