



Tom Bird and
Jeremy Cassell

brilliant selling

Third edition

Praise for the third edition of *Brilliant Selling*

The fundamental issue all firm leaders must address in these transformational times is: 'Why will clients continue to retain my firm?' *Brilliant Selling* provides inspiration as well as actionable techniques, ideas and tips to help you address this essential question. The book encapsulates the valuable teachings that Jeremy has shared with me and my firm as a consultant and coach, and I highly recommend it to all fee earners and to business professionals serving in marketing and business development and practice management roles. It sits proudly on my desk, ready to be dipped into when I need inspiration.

Wendy Bernero, *Global Chief Marketing Officer & Global Director
Clients & Practices, Baker McKenzie*

Having led numerous sales training initiatives, I am aware that so many can flounder if the content and the trainers are not fit for purpose. I have worked with both Jeremy and Tom in our business, Univar Solutions. They have worked with me personally, consulted on special projects, coached senior leaders and trained various parts of our global organisation. I love the fact that they have been able to translate their pragmatic and hands-on approach to this new edition of *Brilliant Selling*. I believe the content of this third edition is just right for both salespeople and sales managers. Jeremy and Tom's approach is simple, fresh and modern, focused on the key selling challenges (for example, social media is here to stay, whether we like it or not!) and will help optimise individual and team performance. This book will certainly be used in any business I lead.

Nick Powell, *President of EMEA & Asia Pacific, Univar Solutions*

I know these guys. I like their approach and their material. How? When I am not doing Comedy Store improvisational work, I am also a business trainer and coach. Tom and Jeremy are well known on the circuit for their engaging delivery, grasp of a brief and deep expertise in sales. Like me, you will get to know them and trust them if you read the third edition of this book and start taking action

chapter 8

Asking the right questions to identify what the prospect wants and needs

When I was learning to be a coach my trainer told me that ‘questions are the answer’. It is much the same with selling. You cannot sell well without gathering information, and it is tough to gather information without asking questions.

Whether you are involved in transactional or consultative selling, it is imperative that you spend time identifying and agreeing what your prospect and their organisation want and need. Avoid selling too quickly. People do not like being sold to. Do you? Usually we become defensive if we know someone is attempting to sell something. Build the relationship, develop trust, listen carefully and keep your overt selling to yourself!

‘You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want.’

Zig Ziglar, author, salesperson and motivational speaker

In a lot of cases, an effective sale can only occur after you have identified what the buyer needs and wants. What are the distinctions?

Brilliant definitions

A **need** is something you have to have, something you cannot do without to survive.

A **want** is something you would like to have. It has emotional pull. And we cannot emphasise enough – a want pulls the emotional strings of desire.

Wants relate to emotions, whereas **needs** relate to something definitive within the specific business.

Generally, people buy what they want. They often don’t just buy what they need. Prospects often do not know what they want. This may be because they do not know what is available. As Henry Ford suggested, ‘If I had asked my customers what they wanted they’d have said a faster horse!’ Buyers sometimes need to understand more about what’s available so that they can make a more informed choice (which, hopefully, is your product/service).

Do you use a fabric conditioner in your house? Very few people were crying out for this product before it was launched by Unilever in the UK in 1969. Now, most modern washing machines have a dispenser that can add liquid fabric softener to the load of laundry automatically, and the market is worth £1 billion per year.

Salespeople typically spend too much time pitching and not enough time taking an interest in discovering the prospect’s/buyer’s real concerns and issues, as well as the hot buttons they need to press to get someone to buy.

So, there are some key benefits of asking the right questions:

- By asking the right questions you will demonstrate that you are interested, rather than being focused on making a sale. This will increase the likelihood that the prospect/buyer will open up and that rapport will start to build.
- You will identify what really matters and what the core issues are that you can help to address.
- It gives you an element of control.
- It creates momentum, which is one of the core goals of every sales conversation.
- Questions encourage emotional involvement.

Asking the right questions

Here are seven core principles that will guide you to ask the right questions:

1 Start with an attitude of curiosity

Any salesperson used to a consultative approach will use questions naturally. Asking intelligent questions comes from an attitude of curiosity. Think about it – you are on a ‘quest’ for information. Anyone who has kids knows that if they are curious about something they will quite naturally ask questions.

Curiosity is infectious. You will soon find that the person you are influencing becomes curious about their own situation!

2 Have a clear outcome for your questions

Ask yourself: what am I trying to achieve by asking questions? This avoids asking unnecessary or random questions.

3 Let the conversation flow naturally

avoid the clipboard approach

Good questioning techniques do not mean that you become an interrogator. Avoid the clipboard approach.

4 Use both open and closed questions

- Open questions start with who, why, what, how, where and when.
- Closed questions elicit a yes/no answer.

There is no evidence that we have ever seen that open questions are more successful in making a sale. However, it is likely that you will start with **open** questions to elicit information and there will be more open questions in a typical sales conversation. Use **closed** questions for clarification and agreement.

5 Make your questions understandable

I have heard many a sales question that is frankly unintelligible. Sometimes people use multiple questions, or ask a question and then answer it themselves, or ask a question that has no real link to what is being discussed. Make sales questions straightforward to understand – often the simple questions are the most powerful. Such as:

- What do you want?
- What are your key priorities?
- What is really going to make the difference?
- What is working for you?

often the simple questions are the most powerful

6 Ask questions that help you pinpoint the dominant buying motivations

Buying motivations and specific needs are not always the same. Buying motivations are about desires and feelings – they are more emotional and intangible.

You can find out what motivates your buyer – what they want – by asking simple questions such as: ‘What kind of similar products or services have you bought in the past?’ The knowledge you gain will tell you what benefits to emphasise.

7 Avoid offending your buyers!

Some questions can offend a prospect and cause them to reject you and your ideas.

Avoid leading or ‘set-up’ questions such as, ‘You do want your children to have a fair chance, don’t you?’ What is the prospect going to say? ‘No! It’s a tough world – let them sink or swim!’

Be mindful of the balance between appropriate curiosity and coming across as too personal or nosey.

Sometimes your manner can be threatening. Instead of asking, ‘How much do you want to spend?’, why not phrase it, ‘How much had you planned to invest?’

Focused questions

‘If you are not moving closer to what you want in sales (or in life), you probably aren’t doing enough asking.’

**Jack Canfield, US inspirational self-help
author and success coach**

So – what areas of questioning are most useful? Research suggests that you will make the most impact if you focus your questioning around these nine areas:

1 Needs and wants

This is absolutely central to the role of the salesperson, particularly in complex or big-ticket sales, or if you use a consultative approach to selling. Understanding needs and wants requires you to identify the current business situation of the client first and, from the

perspective of that knowledge, begin to identify the key business problems they face and the implications of these problems to their business. Spending time identifying the specific problems and their implications helps bring context to what a client wants from you. They often don't want your 'product', but rather the value it brings to them in helping to avoid or solve a problem or achieve something that they have identified as wanting.

Here are some questions you might consider:

- 'What is your vision for your business?'
- 'What are the key challenges facing you in your business right now?'
- 'What's on your mind?'
- 'How satisfied are you with your current suppliers?'
- 'What kinds of obstacles are you facing in this area?'
- 'What effect does this (problem) have?'
- 'What sort of risk would this constitute if nothing was done about it?'
- 'What does this reduction in income mean for growth?'

Brilliant exercise

Think about your own selling context. What other questions are there that would work well for you?

2 Ask the buyer for selection criteria

This is often avoided in sales, so take the initiative and find out who your contact is dealing with right now and who else they might be considering. This will elicit the buyer's criteria and values and will help you align your service/product with what the organisation wants.

The more you can align the values of the buyer with what you can provide in terms of service and delivery, the more likely you are to build a long-term relationship. I had a colleague once who was even more upfront. He used to ask: 'What can I do to win your business?'