

Some 'Killer' Questions you can ask at Discovery stage.

The Discovery phase is a great opportunity you have to stand out from your competitors and steal 'Pole Position' in a potential deal. Asking deep, probing questions helps demonstrate your knowledge, skill, and ability to deliver the best solution. It also enables the business to get a much tighter grasp of its sales pipeline and revenue forecasts.

1. Why are you doing this (and why are you doing this now) ?

Most business decisions are not impulse purchases, they are logical and often planned ahead. Beware of rushed requirements that lack detail and clarity as this might indicate a weaker prospect that might not be quite so serious. This also allows you to get the 'heart' of the client's issue – something to always refer back to in your summary/proposal. **'Why are you doing this now ?'** is a great follow up question after the start. It creates clarity about timescales of the potential purchase. You can always refer back to this to ensure that the prospect is committed to the timeline indicated. If they are not worried about timing, then again you may not have such a serious prospect after all.

2. Why have you not addressed this challenge/issue before ?

A 3-dimensional question to get them thinking about the challenges (externally and internally), issues they may foresee and how big a deal this is to them.

3. Can you please tell me the decision-making process (and who is involved) ?

Often salespeople ask 'Who is the ultimate decision maker' which is a potentially challenging question. Someone who may not have sufficient authority may feel intimidated. If you ask 'what the process is' you are likely to get much more than a single answer. You may well get - who is involved (multiple names), the timescale (specific), how they operate internally, who has more influence than others.

4. What criteria are you using to arrive at your decision ?

Another great question that allows you to probe into the internal process they are going to consider. Listen and absorb, this allows you to tailor your responses and back your proposal up with additional supporting documentation such as Case Studies and References

5. What is the risk if you do nothing ?

This is a great question to ask to peek out the seriousness of an enquiry. It will also reinforce the importance in the eyes of the prospect. If the answer is 'not much' then you know you have less ability to develop a compelling proposal.

6. When does this need to happen and why ?

Again, focus their minds on whatever things they need to do internally and any potential issues that they are likely to face. This can also highlight any potential internal power struggles with people such as family, colleagues, and fellow Directors.

7. How does this project/opportunity impact you personally/professionally ? ?

Make the prospect think about what's in it for them, it may help seal the deal and give them the comfort they are looking for and take away some pain they may be worrying about. Making someone think personally about an outcome is a very powerful lever.

8. Can we please agree next steps ?

Don't be fobbed off by 'just send a quote' without a follow up. Take a lead – 'OK so I'm going to do X, and you're going to do Y'

Finally - don't forget that if you feel you can glean or gain more insight, don't be afraid to ask:

Tell me a little more.....(you can use this prompt to add to any of the Discovery questions)

Quality questions to consider at the Discovery phase are the key to a quality sales pipeline.

It's a 'Discovery' exercise and not an 'Interrogation' – prepare well, practice and always make it conversational.

Step/Point	Logic/Process/Considerations	Quality Questions and Tactics
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't make the call until you're ready and prepared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check out LinkedIn, Website, Blogs, Credit Checking (if necessary)
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to know why they are planning what they are, and why now. Unless it's an impulsive purchase we need the logic that they are applying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why are you doing this now? Why haven't you addressed this in the past? Why do you think this will make a difference? What difference will this make to you?
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely will people provide this straight up so be creative with your questions? Don't be scared to probe hard here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Have you invested in similar projects before'. Our projects range from £X to £Y (you may want to give a wide range to 'catch' most options)
Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely will someone only consider 1 supplier so don't be fobbed off? Know your competition well. The biggest competitor is doing nothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who else you are looking at (Direct or Vendor)? What happens if you do nothing? Why are you also considering them? What do they offer that is different to us?
Wants/Fears/Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without addressing the Wants, Fears and Needs you have no prospect. Listen hard and always probe further. Make sure you get the prospect to tell you their priorities – never assume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the impact of these challenges/pains? Why do you think you need to change? What are the critical pains you're looking to fix? What does success actually look like? What else is changing in the business?
Timescale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It allows you to plan your response and timings (and make sure we can deliver) This is a critical question that always needs addressing with the prospect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When does this need to happen? How will things be impacted if there are delays your side? What happens if you do nothing?
USP/Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why will they buy from us and not the competition? You need to be clear why we are best for them and be able to articulate it strongly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm sure we've done that/something similar for client X – will that be useful? I have a case study for that, would you like me to share this (and the story)? Would speaking to another client be of value?
Decision Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You need to understand their priorities and their thoughts. Try not to get brushed off with this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are you going to make this decision? What stages are you doing to evaluate options? What is the actual decision-making process?
Risks/Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand what risks or concerns the buyer may have and address. Don't ignore this topic and always understand their concerns fully. People won't buy without confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the risks if you do nothing? Why do you need to do this? Who else does this decision impact? What is the feeling among the team? What are you looking for from a Partner?
Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatever we are proposing for clients we must articulate the solution clearly. Make sure you confirm that they the understand what is being proposed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What criteria are you using on the solution? How do we address the requirements? How will you know if you've found the right solution and supplier?
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No sale will progress without commitment from both sides. Seek commitment that the right people are going to be involved at right times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is likely to slow this from your side? What needs to happen next at your side? If I get X arranged, I need you to arrange Y Are you able to respond quickly throughout?
Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak clearly, concisely and don't be scared to pause to confirm pace. Look/seek out any delays and ask whether they are comfortable. Don't be embarrassed to pause the client to confirm your understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What specific concerns might you have about us? How does this feel to you as a partnership? What else can I do to influence your decision? What else that we haven't spoken about do you think I need to know?
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't be scared to over communicate. Try to lead with 2-way communication (phone, face to face, Teams) Don't hide behind email or 1-way communication methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your favoured communication method? How do you like to be treated as a client? How we operate best is X, is that good? I like to be proactive and respond very quickly – will you be able to commit to the same?