

Cold Outreach Quickstart

Using questions to provoke conversations

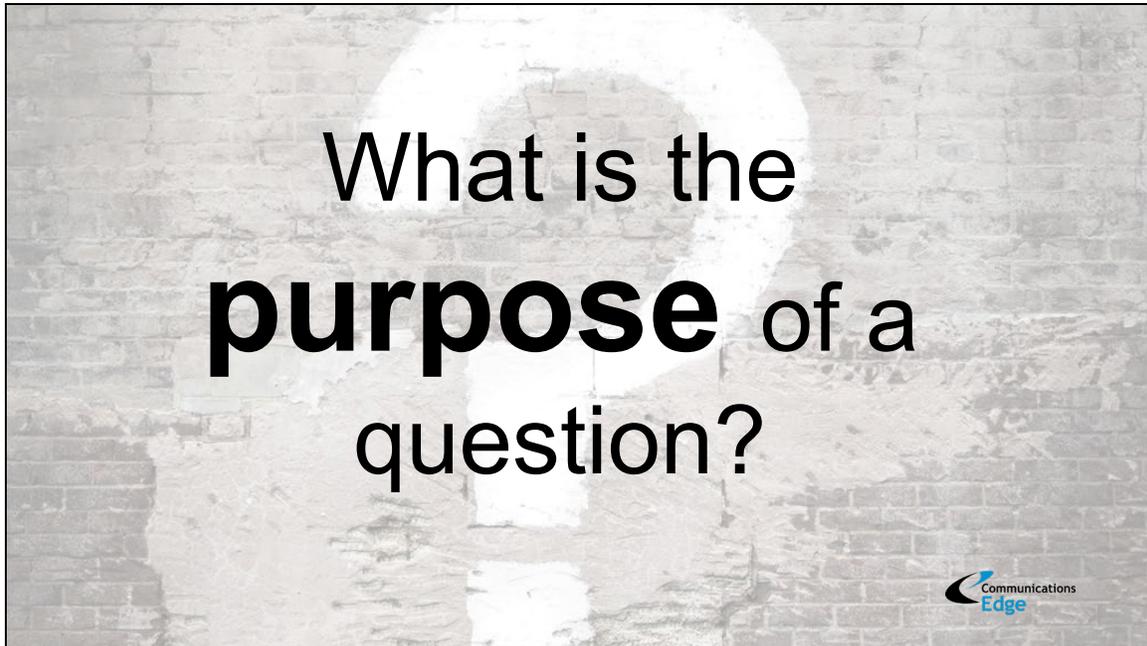
with Jeff Molander

Founder 

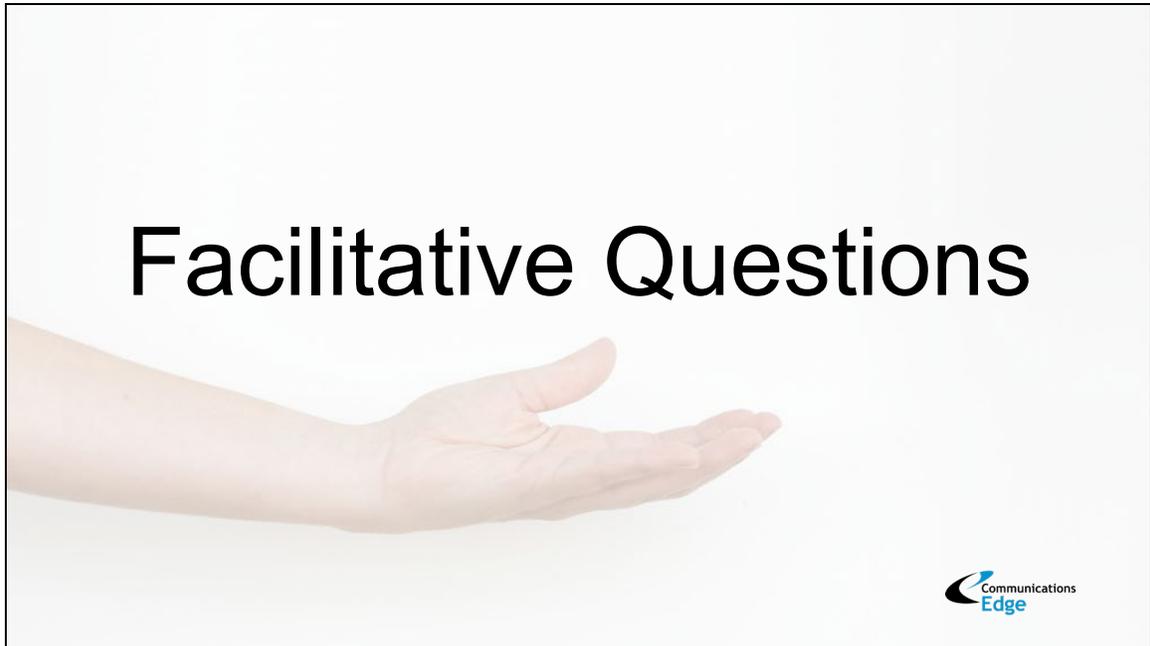


Markus Spiske

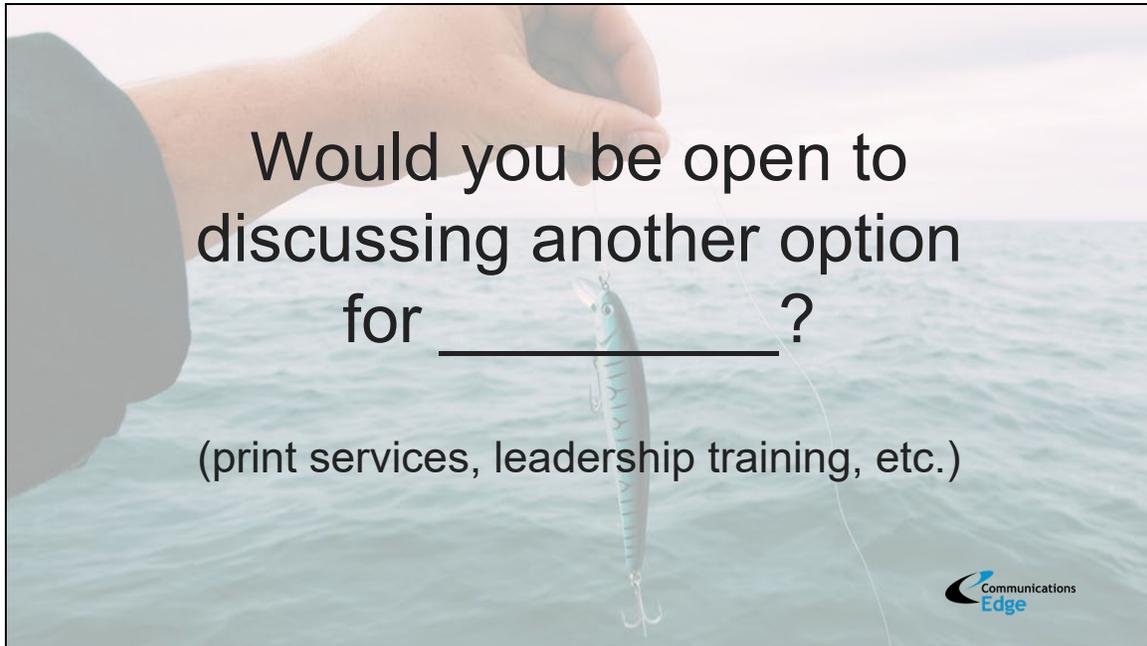
Welcome to the next lesson in our quickstart... using questions to provoke conversations. What you're going to take away from this lesson is an innovative, new and reliable way to grab customers attention -- by standing out in the inbox or in voicemail -- and, also, cause customers to stop. Stop and think about their own, selfish situation. Their status quo situation or their business environment. Or their decision-making process... or lack of that process. Or problem they're busy creating for themselves. So to do this you'll also take away a different view of questions in general. One based on behavioral psychology. Now, the goal of using questions extends from starting to re-starting and, also, forwarding conversations more effectively. So questions can serve multiple purposes. Ok. I'll start with a really obvious question. What is a question? As dumb as it sounds, we need to answer this... this question!



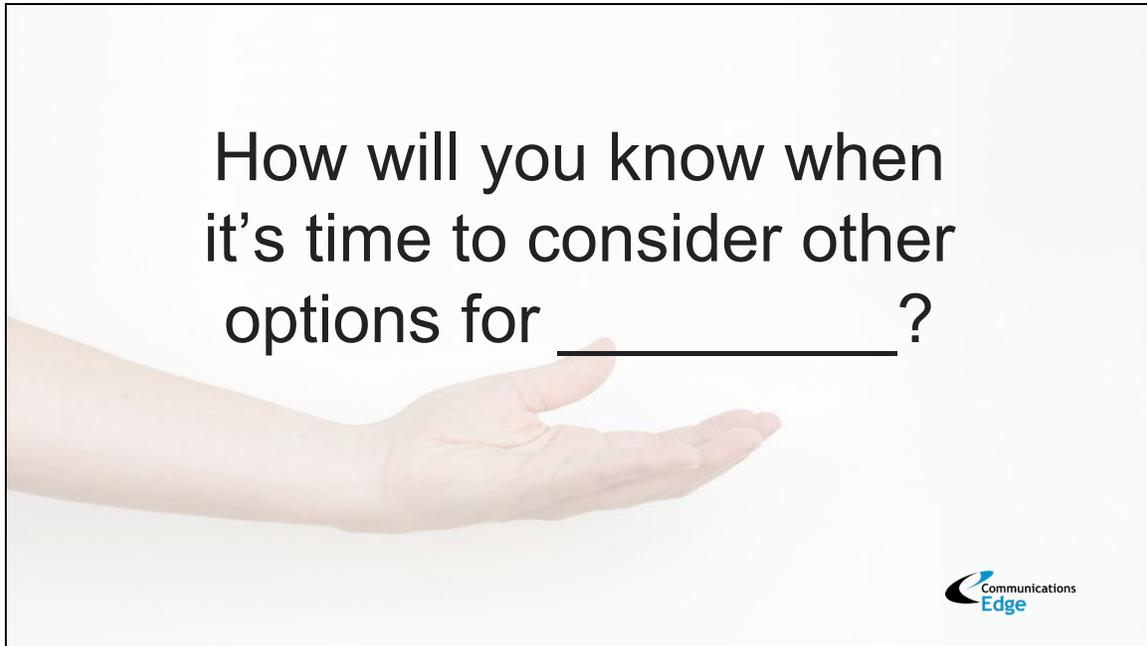
What is the purpose of a question? Answer: Usually, earn a response... a response providing us with information. Sometimes questions are 'closed', like in, "What time is dinner?" Sometimes they're 'open', like "What do you want to eat?" But there is a common characteristic to all questions used in a conventional sales context: they are biased by the needs of the seller... they're trying to elicit information from the customer. Information we (selfishly) want. So we can qualify the conversation and move it forward. Nothing wrong with that. Clients are selfish too. So that's why questions need to be mutually beneficial. The purpose of a good question is to benefit both sides. So we tend to use Facilitative Questions.



We'll talk about these in a moment... in more detail. Here's why this is important to you: Conventional questions are problematic in sales outreach. Because conventional questions are too selfish. Here are a few examples from sellers I've been coaching lately...



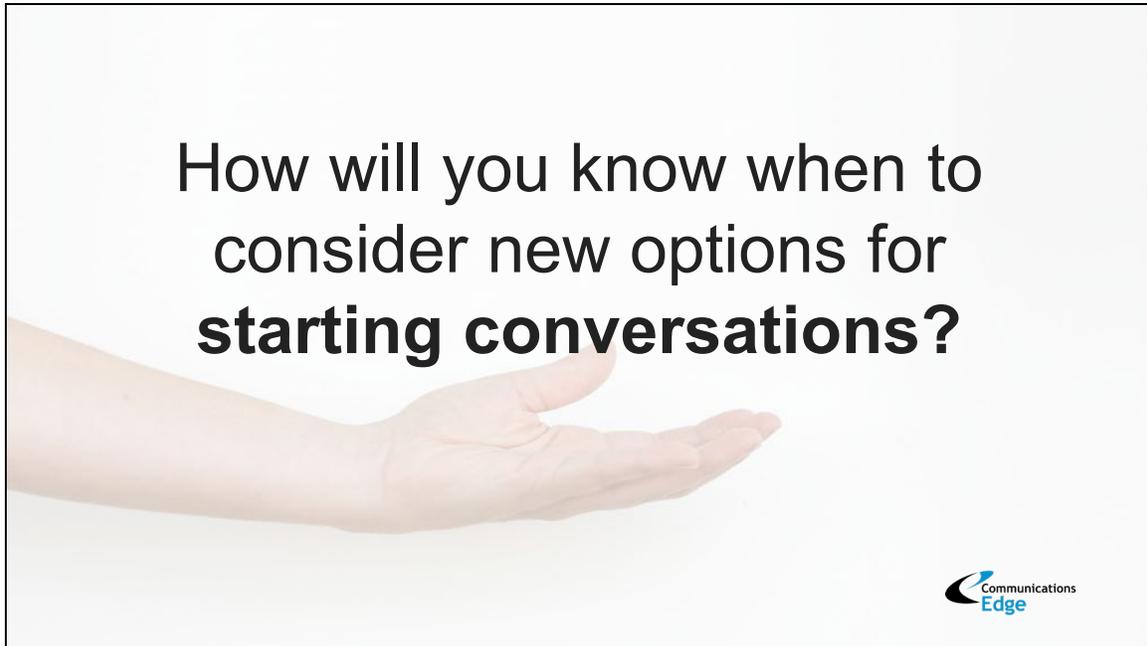
Would you be open to discussing another option for blank? Print services, leadership training... whatever service or outcome the customer may desire. First, would is conditional. And expresses weak tone. Are you open? That's bold, strong. Not wishy washy. But overall it's a yes/no question. Fine. But not the best at starting conversations in most cases. Ok. Ready? Watch this.



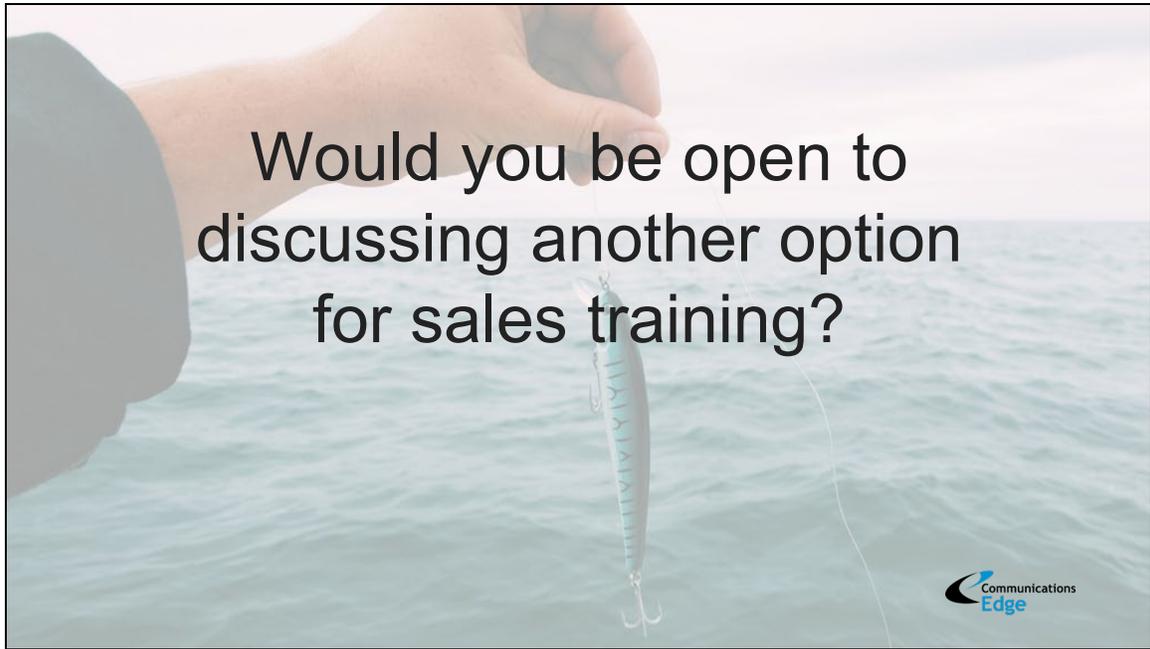
How will you know when
it's time to consider other
options for _____?



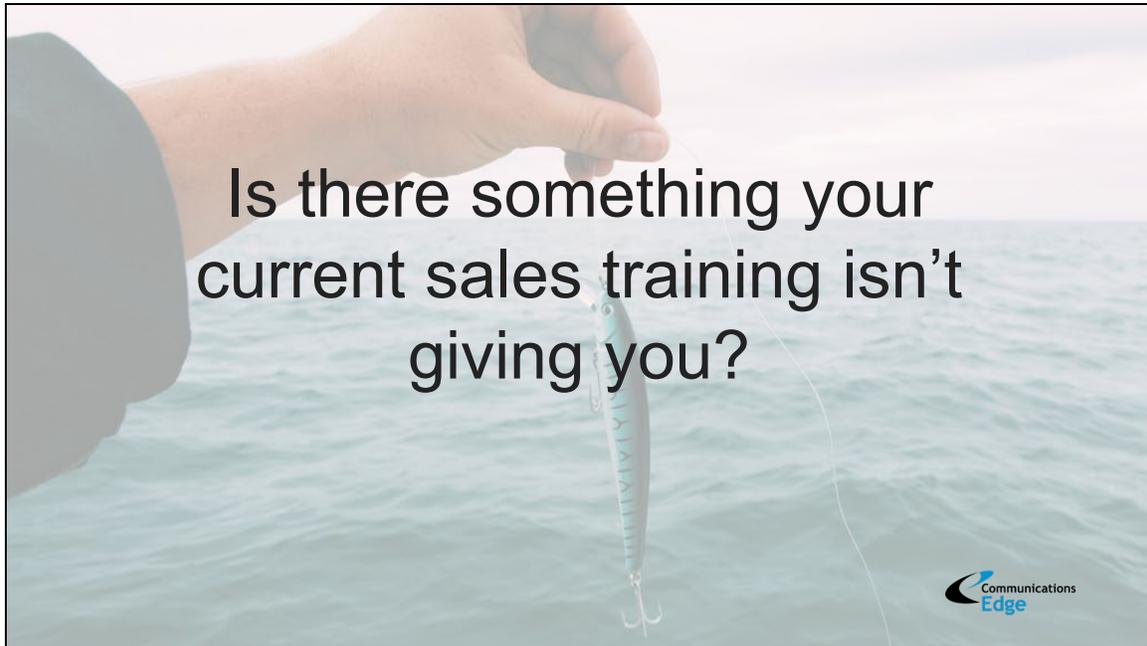
Instead, “How will you know when.... how will you know when it’s time to consider other options for blank?” Let that soak in for a minute. We’ll dissect the differences in a moment.



For example, “How will you know when to consider new options for starting conversations?” I hope you see the difference. If you don’t, we’re going to go through the details. Or how about this... let’s convert this back into what we see most often: A marketing hook. A conventional question we often see in sales outreach.



Would you be open to discussing another option for sales training?



Or is there something your current sales training isn't giving you? While this is somewhat facilitative... and it's not a yes/no question... which we always want to avoid... it is very biased to the answer we seek. My asking this to you isn't fooling you right? You can detect why I'm asking if your current situation isn't making you happy -- so I can sell to you. This question signals "sales pitch ahead."



What's preventing you from
considering new
conversation-starting tactics?



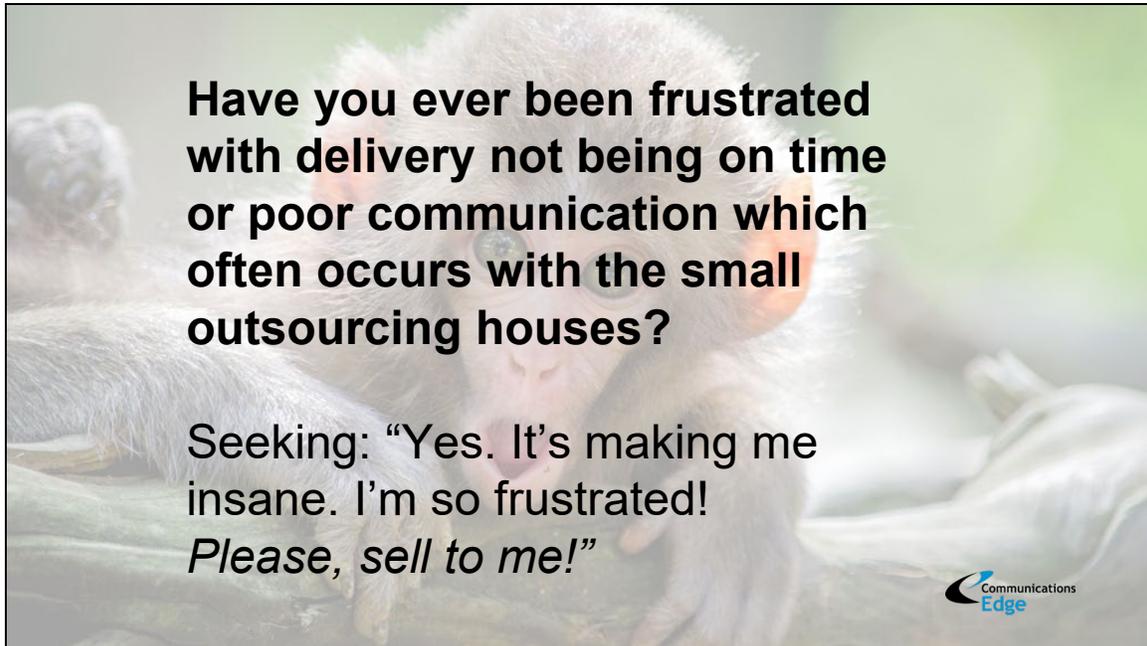
But when I do this... “What’s preventing you from considering new conversation-starting tactics?” When I ask you THIS question, I’m not teeing you up for a pitch. I’m merely suggesting you examine your situation -- with helping you in mind. If there’s something preventing you from growing beyond conventional thinking... obtaining fresh new tactics... you should give that something consideration. This kind of question doesn’t make you feel vulnerable to my sales pitch -- so much as it probably helps you think to yourself, “why are you asking this question? ... this smart question I probably should be asking myself!” I hope you see the difference. If you don’t, we’re going to go through the details. Facilitating conversations... as opposed to asking for meetings... is all about servant leadership. Ok. One more



Are you happy with your current vendors? Another a yes/no question. Which generally should be avoided.. for a handful of reasons. This question selfishly seeks the reply, “No.” Why? So the asker of the question can sell. The question is self-serving and customers immediately sense this... and run the other way. Because the question is designed to make them feel vulnerable to a sales pitch if they respond. And they’re seeing biased, selfish “hook” questions like this all the time. Over and over. Daily. Why? Because most sellers are lazy and are following the lead of marketers. Low-skilled marketers who ask these questions--which are fitting for a radio or TV ad. But not in sales outreach messages... on LinkedIn, email or a voicemail. We sabotage ourselves with questions like this because it’s easy to write like a marketer. We see bad questions on a daily basis. It’s monkey see, monkey do.



Here are a few more... “Do you feel your client reporting solution is as effective an efficient as possible?” Notice how the question seeks the answer: “No, my current solution isn’t as effective as possible.” “Want a secret on how to add additional profit for 2020?” This question asks if the customer wants access to a secret... oof. Bad marketing copywriting hooks.



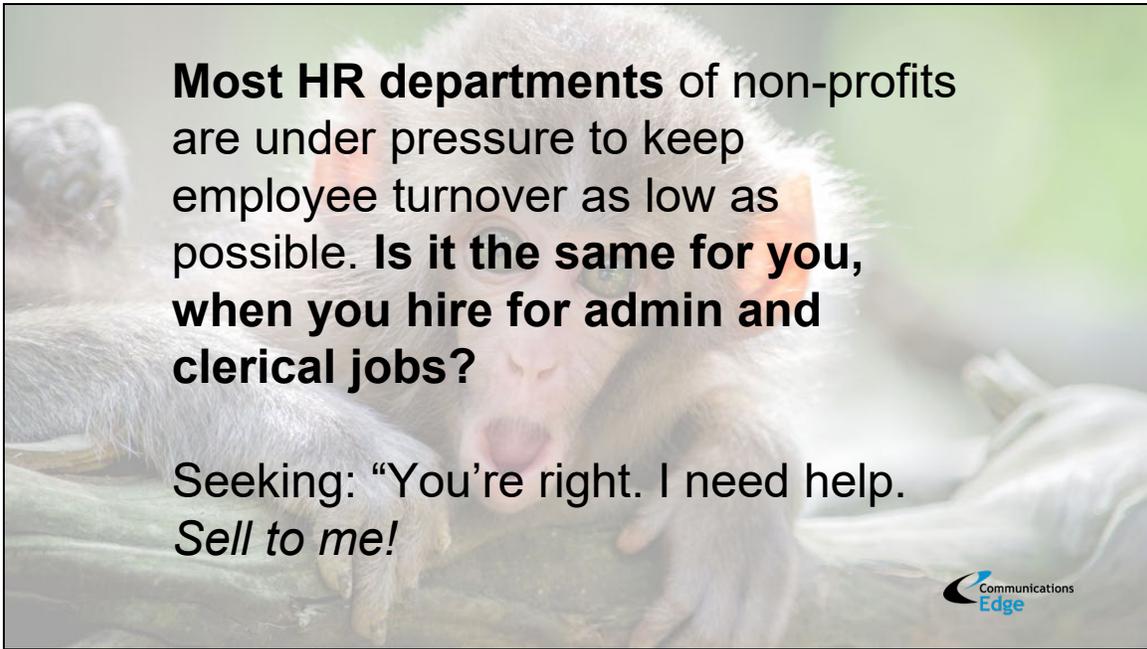
Have you ever been frustrated with delivery not being on time or poor communication which often occurs with the small outsourcing houses?

Seeking: “Yes. It’s making me insane. I’m so frustrated!
Please, sell to me!”



“Have you ever been frustrated with delivery not being on time or poor communication which often occurs with the small outsourcing houses?”

This is clearly seeking a, “Yes, it’s making me insane. I’m so frustrated. Please sell to me.”



Most HR departments of non-profits are under pressure to keep employee turnover as low as possible. **Is it the same for you, when you hire for admin and clerical jobs?**

Seeking: “You’re right. I need help.
Sell to me!”



“Most HR departments of non-profits are under pressure to keep employee turnover as low as possible. Is it the same for you, when you hire for admin and clerical jobs?” Awful. Such a setup. It’s seeking a, “Sell to me *please!*”



There are 2 problems with conventional questions: 1) Prospects know they are traps. The tone is so selfish they immediately think, “Uh oh, someone trying to trap me with a question--so they can sell to me if I answer.” They realize: “If I answer this I’m putting myself in a vulnerable position. They’ll know I’m a target.” So they run the other way... delete, mark as spam or hang up on you if it’s a call. The 2nd problem is how conventional questions restrict answers to the boundaries of the question. Example...If I ask you what type of shoes you wear in the summer



You're not going to explain the foot surgeries you've had due to a running accident. You're going to talk only about the shoes. Even if you're willing to talk about the foot surgery with me. In other words, conventional questions cannot uncover information you never asked for... even if it's available... even if the prospect is willing to share it. Ok. This is a more complex concept.. extending into questions you ask after the conversation is started. There's a ton I can share with you on that. But today let's focus on the #1 problem questions present for you when prospecting from cold: They are risky to use.



Heh. Now that is a bug taking an unnecessary risk. I love it! Look... I'm not saying don't use questions in cold outreach. I am saying a) know what, exactly, makes a strong question when prospecting And b) know the risk of using questions in general. The main risk is simple: Customers realizing, "he or she is asking the question -- so they can get an answer -- allowing them to sell to me." Whether it's a hook question in the first cold email -- or a qualification question on a discovery call -- questions are risky. Even when we take care and construct them carefully. But using the right question (at the right time) can be very effective at provoking conversation. Bottom line you have got to take risks when prospecting. But they've got to be smart ones. And you've got to be a Servant Leader, not a seller. So what does that mean? Well... here's a practical way of looking at it. You can tell people "I'm here to help you!" But that's not serving them It's not. It's SEEN as you serving yourself. So instead... you've got to...



help customers want to be helped -- then help. Help the decision-maker feel an urge to request your knowledge. This ALWAYS starts more & better conversations. They'll value your offer more... and want to talk more. Because it was their idea. And -- the best part -- because it's a fit for both sides. Qualification -- on both buyer and seller sides -- is BUILT IN to the model. Ok. Let's see an example! But before we do... I'm a researcher, a practitioner and I enjoy finding new ways to get conversations started using a behavioral science approach. And everything I'm sharing with you today is based on my experience. And the collective experience...



of everyone in our private, Spark Selling Academy community. Our students. All over the world. That said, I am a student. I'm a student of our students. That is what makes me qualified to make suggestions to you. So everything I'm sharing today is based on our *collective* experience. Not my opinion. Also, if I say something that doesn't square with your experience push back. Disagree with me.



I am fine with it. I'm a learner too. If you feel I'm misinformed or misguided push back. Let me know in the comments below this video, send an email. Otherwise I risk overlooking your experience. You are the expert in your customers' domain. I am the expert in mine... which can be limited compared to yours. Ok...

Questions *are* useful

Inbound leads

Outbound prospecting

Customers actively considering investing



Questions are dangerous... but, yes, they are useful to provoke conversations with inbound leads, outbound prospects and customers you're looking to close... who are trying to choose vendors. Real quick: regarding inbound leads... most questions being asked to trial-takers or anyone who's raised a hand... via webinars, downloads... whatever. If you're not seeing engagement with your leads 90% probability, it's your conventional questions sabotaging you. Our members like Adam Breitenstein of Recart are making huge strides... by changing up their questions...

Adam at Recart

Our previous reply rate from inbound leads was 4.59%.

*Now, it's averaging 35%.
That's a **700% increase**,
and we haven't peaked yet.*



When we met Adam, he was suffering. His reply rate from inbound leads was 4 and a half percent. It wasn't enough. He was swimming in trial clients but unable to engage them via email and move them onto the phone. If this is important to you get in touch with Brittany or myself so we can get Adam's case study over to you. We were able to increase his response rate to around 35%. Amazing. Not only from his messaging.. he made a few operational changes too. But he did this mostly by changing the questions he was asking to his inbound leads. Facilitative questions can be used effectively to start, restart and advance conversations with trial or demo leads, webinars, people who've downloaded papers.

Questions *are* useful

Inbound leads

Outbound prospecting

Customers actively considering investing



Of course, outbound prospecting efforts (calls, voicemail and email scripts) will benefit from unbiased, facilitative questions. And I'm about to give examples of such questions and a formula to create them. Stay with me. Bottom line: Questions are useful when calling on prospects... across email, phone and voicemail. However they must be mutually useful.



So... in order to stop customers from deleting (and provoke curiosity) our Academy members are applying un-biased “facilitative” questions—custom designed to help prospects reflect on their uncertain situation... the status quo. We’re getting better response by avoiding seeking answers we want to hear... or confirm prospects pains. Here’s another way of looking at these questions: Facilitative questions are questions you, yourself, don’t have a stake in... they don’t seek information you would use to your advantage. They’re just asking the prospect to reflect on their business environment.

EXAMPLE

Subject: Sage idea

Hi {{ contact.firstname }},

Considering you are _____ you should at least know about a new Sage feature – Salary & Supplier Payments.

Too biased.

- Are you tasked with managing large workloads at critical payment periods?
- Are you constantly going between systems to reconcile payment data?
- Do you run payroll for your clients?

If any of the following resonate with you then we could likely have a very productive conversation

Would you like to discover how much time could be saved in a quick call?



Here's an example from Garath in financial services... who is calling on existing customers using Sage (a software tool)... and he's seeking a conversation with them about engaging his company which is a plugin to Sage basically. They have a partnership with Sage, just like some software firms have partnerships with Salesforce.com. Notice the questions he's asking...

EXAMPLE

Subject: Sage idea

Open. Less biased.

Hi {{ contact.firstname }},
Considering you are _____ you should at least know about a new Sage
feature – Salary & Supplier Payments. **Are you open to considering a better way to**
_____?

- manage large workloads at critical payment periods?
- eliminate going between systems to reconcile payment data?

Highly *niche* problems to solve.



Notice: No active promotion of the better way! This keeps the tone neutral.

EXAMPLE

Subject: Sage idea

Facilitative

Hi {{ contact.firstname }},

Considering you are _____ you should at least know about a new Sage feature – Salary & Supplier Payments. **Is anything stopping you from considering a way to centralize payment reconciliation data? (avoid jumping between systems)**



Notice how this question encourages the reader to introspect... to evaluate their situation at this moment in time. To reason to themselves... “why is it that I cannot look at ways to stop using 3 software tools rather than just 1).



The idea here is to structure questions in ways that are more likely to start conversations with customers... more likely to break the pattern of selfish questions and meeting requests they're seeing every day. Instead, ask questions less likely to chase them away. More open and more neutral. Helping them stop for a moment and consider how they will address their situation.. in a way that doesn't make them feel like you baiting or are leading them. Because you aren't.



You know what those feel like right? Bait for traps. So when we conclude today, take time to look critically at the questions you're asking. You need facilitative questions... to encourage introspection in away, that puts the customer on a path to considering change... If, in fact, change is needed.



Think of it this way: Whether you're trying to start (from cold), restart conversation with a warm lead in a voicemail, email or LinkedIn message... your questions can go beyond hooks. They can be the guide. The compass. The GPS... to:



1) stand out and 2) provoke thought and then 3) lead customers through their own discovery process to uncover their own best answers – without the feeling you have a biased interest in the decision they’ll eventually make. Instead, your questions help customers discover...“hey, this is something I need to explore fixing or upgrading or implementing or addressing.” All without feeling like you coerced that conclusion. Instead, the customer persuades him or herself... If, in fact, considering changing is smart at the moment.



A bit of caution: sometimes people take these examples and apply them... unsuccessfully. So you've been warned. If you surround these questions with other problematic copy your facilitative question will fail. I do want you to think about how you'll form your facilitative question. And experiment. Of course. But beware. You'll probably need many other adjustments inside your current messaging. The goal of FQs is merely to serve others in finding their own best answers. Using this tactic does require a lot of practice... honestly... so please consider our coaching and cost-effective learning options in the Academy.

"How are you insuring drug inventory remains accurate when transferring between locations?"

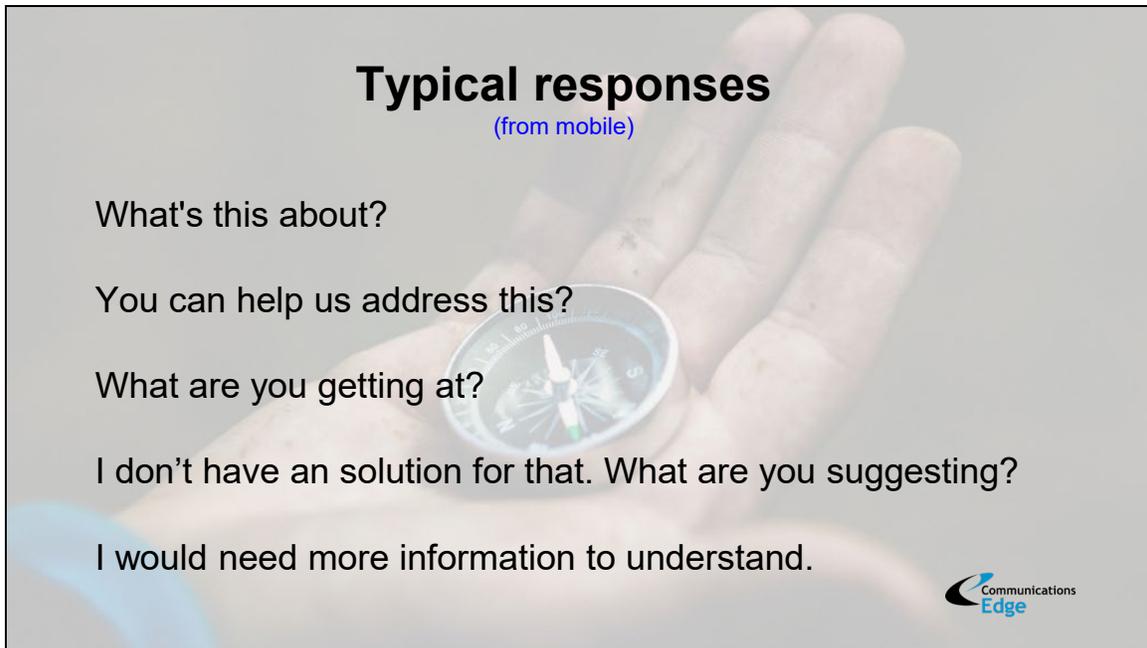


Douglas E. Mooradian
ArbiMed



The slide features a background image of a hand holding a compass. The text is positioned on the left side of the slide. A portrait of Douglas E. Mooradian is on the right. The Communications Edge logo is in the bottom left corner of the slide area.

Ok. Quick shout out to Douglas Mooradian. Douglas came up with this gem. Look how specific this one is...



Typical responses

(from mobile)

What's this about?

You can help us address this?

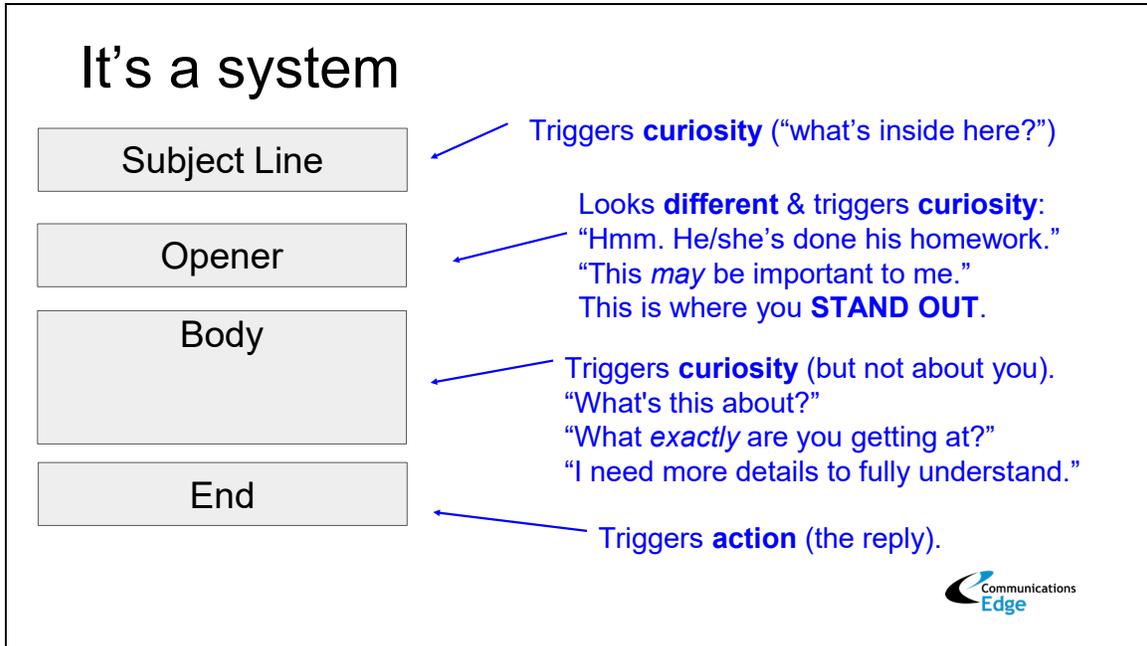
What are you getting at?

I don't have an solution for that. What are you suggesting?

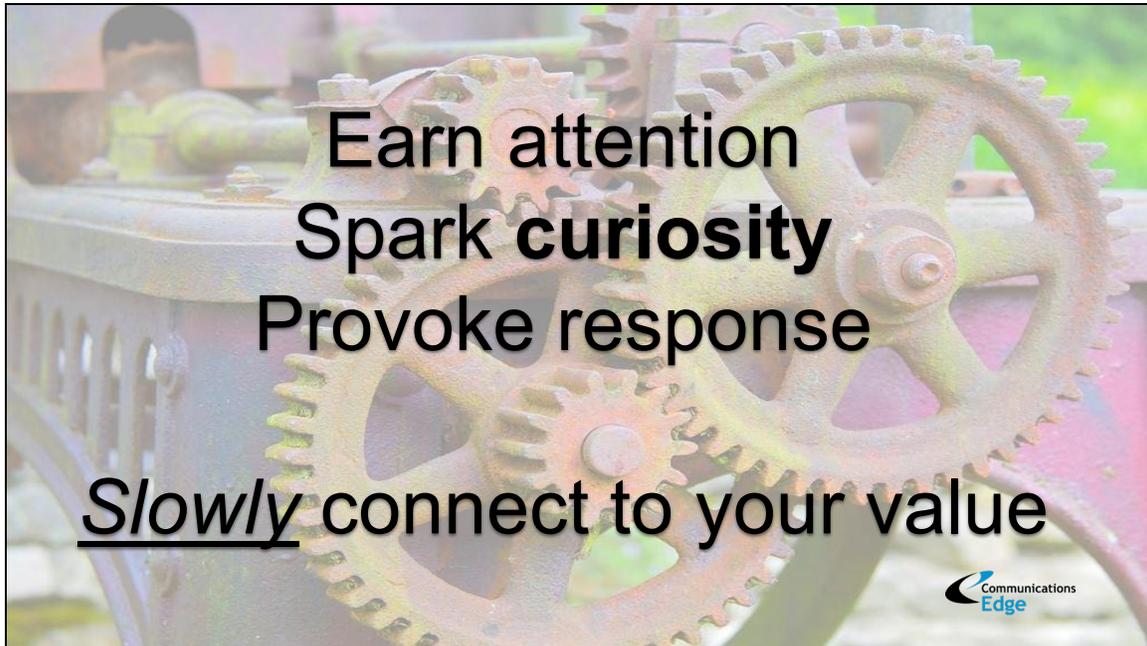
I would need more information to understand.



Because responses often come from mobile devices -- and because of how incomplete or unclear the messages are typical responses look like this...



Ok. Now please remember... facilitative questions are an optional part of a more systematic approach to provoking conversations. A practice-based on triggering curiosity. Using behavioral science. And notice how it's a flow of curiosity. We trigger curiosity with the subject line... the opener stands out, looks different... and triggers more curiosity. And we have various ways of achieving this in our practice. We may use the facilitative question up front. This is a practice, keep in mind. But then again, we may use it more effectively in the body or at the end. There are various tactical options to achieve our goal. But ALL involve a less is more, behavioral method of structuring your message to provoke response. And if you want to get good at Facilitative Question creation and use, I encourage you to invest in personal coaching.



And remember... the way forward is simple: A 3 step process. A communication process. Where now you will have a better way to earn attention, spark curiosity and provoke response more often. Then you'll slowly connect that conversation to your value... if, in fact, that conversation needs to happen. Ok. Now coming up next, we're going to dive into what to do when prospects begin responding back to you. It's so important to slowly connect the conversation to your value... and to stay focused on them, not you. Even when invited to pitch.

See you in lesson #5

“They responded -- now what?!”

Jeff Molander
Founder 



Markus Spiske

So I'll see you in lesson 5. Because the #1 reason customers stop responding is because their desire to learn more was fully satisfied by your initial response. Not because they lost interest. Your first response must be focused on them and be very short. Here's why this is important to you: When buyers invite your pitch don't. Instead, create tension. I'll show you how to give them space to develop (you guessed it) curiosity... so they stay engaged, ask another question (express more interest). Come learn an unconventional "less is more" tactic to keep engagement going strong and avoid going dark. See you in the next lesson.