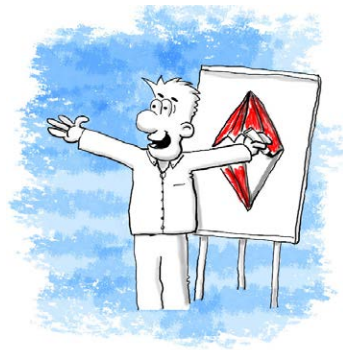


PERSONAL SALES SKILLS

Thoughts on essential personal sales skills



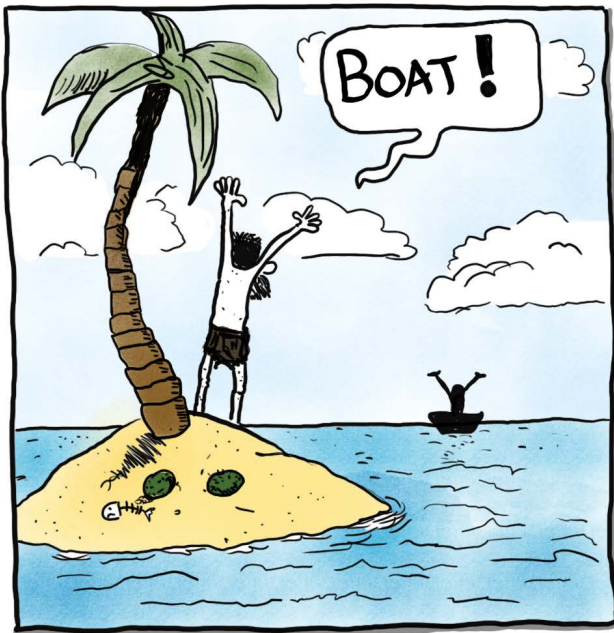
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Sales as appreciative dialogue



It's not about us or our product. If we do all the talking, we learn nothing about the other person. If we do all the talking, we're in the spotlight. If we do all the talking, we don't empower the other person. Our job is not to listen and respond. Your job is to gain information and create a vibrant dialogue.

Selling is much more than a set of neat techniques that one is using to achieve her or his goals. Sales is not about broadcasting one-way talks to your potential audience. Sales is about making a connection, seeing and helping customers to understand, eventually creating value for the customer, and then be able to capture part of that value for ourselves.

There is no future without recurring value creation for the customer. Therefore we should expand the definition of sales to include active encouragement to engage in appreciative dialogue with prospective customers.

Appreciative dialogue is the primary condition for accruing customer understanding and constructive forward engagement, eventually leading to value creation opportunities.

What is good dialogue?

Each of us sees things differently. Our point of view always affects what we see. Our previous knowledge, our experience on the subject, affects how we interpret what we see. Depending on our unique perspective, things we see always looks somewhat different.

If other people are looking at the same object in the same space, it is easy to assume that we know they see. Even the same things may have a very different meaning to another party. To learn and understand other perspectives, it may be a good idea to jump to their side of the object and engage dialogue about what they see and perceive.

Dialogue is about to create new understanding and to learn together. At its best, this understanding creates opportunities for value creation.

Dialogue requires courage

Many of us are not willing to volunteer to start discussing with strangers or topics that are unknown to us. However, this would often create the best opportunities to learn about things we do not know about. Getting started is easy; simply ask open-ended questions and hear what happens.

Cornerstones of a good relationship

Many factors are affecting our ability to succeed in the creation of a good customer relationship. Our marketing strategy, business model,

our assumptions about the customer, and our value proposition have all essential roles defining this. We need to build relationship with customer in order to test these assumptions. A Good relationship is built on three essential elements.

The relationship is built on trust

It takes time and trust to build a good relationship. Trust allows us to gain a customer perspective. Trust helps us to see customers' needs and desires. It helps to understand better why customers feel what they feel. Without trust, we can only make educated guesses about the customer's needs.

Understanding customer perspective is key to value creation

Trust will open doors to the customer world. When that door is open, we can start our expedition to create insights about the customer. What does she think? What does she want or need? What is the language she uses and understands?

What does her environment look like in her day to day life? What is she afraid of? What is driving her? Better we know her' world, better we can create something useful for her.

Image day as a customer, what would that day feel and look?

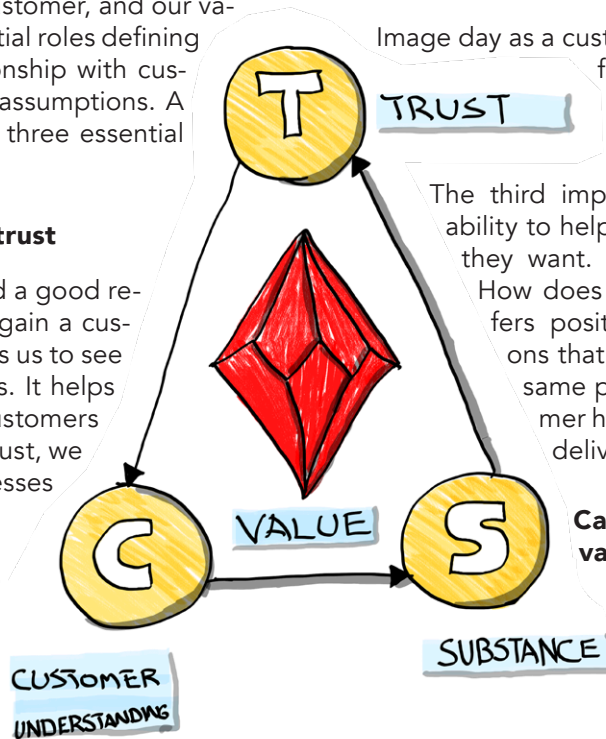
How can we help?

The third important cornerstone is our ability to help the customer to get what they want. What can we do to her? How does our value proposition differs positively from all other options that she may have to solve the same pain or desire? Is the customer happy about how we plan to deliver value to her?

Can we deliver customer value?

When we capture all the corners, we may have the possibility to create value for the customer. Finally, it is the customer who decides

our destiny; we can only help them to see and understand the potential value that we might be able to deliver for her.



The Customer is interested in value

A company's most important success factor is a continuous ability to create Value for a customer. The starting point in creating value in a marketing strategy is our best guess of the value that we could possibly create for the customer. The customer is not interested in the our products or services but instead of the value they create. A product or service is a tool for creating value.

The customer decides on the value. The customer's hope for something better or experienced pain are possibilities that may act as sources of value. The customer may not be aware of this yet and at this point he/she is not particularly interested in agreeing on our suggestions of value.

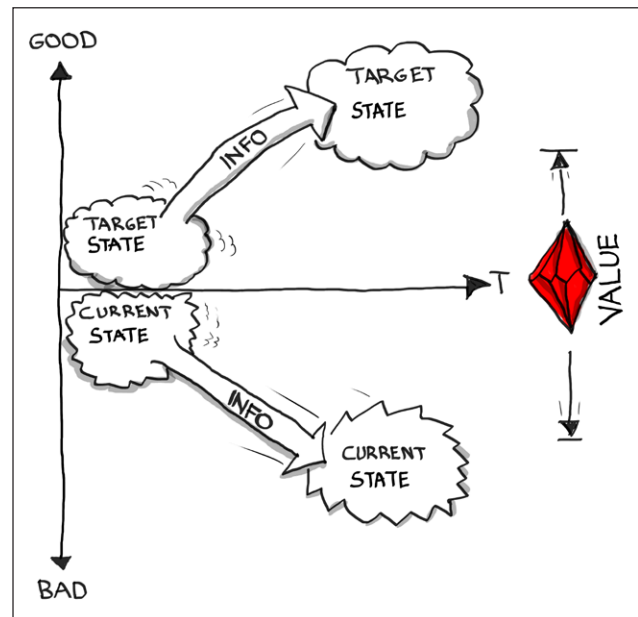
However, we may suggested value by having a appreciative dialogue with customer about these two factors. With the help of a good dialogue we can shed light on the customers possible pain or gain from perspective and help the customer re-evaluate the situation in light of the new information. This can help him/her identify the possibility of value. When creating or growing value, in other words during sales, it is all about the format of this dialogue.

A sales conversation is a goal-oriented discussion, where the topic is the value possibly created for the customer. This conversation is carried out from the perspective that is familiar to the customer touching on such preferences and pains that the customer is able to identify.

The principle of creating and growing value is as follows: Let's imagine that we are having a conversation with a customer from two perspectives which relate to his/her important daily issue or task. We ask him/her to describe how he/she handles it now and in his/her opinion what is the best way of handling it. If he/she believes to already be handling it in the best possible way or very close to this, there probably is no reason for him/her to handle it differently. No need.

A new perspective makes the creation of Value possible

In a value creating conversation, the salesperson offers the customer a piece of information that changes their views of the current situation or goal further away from the starting point. The further apart the two diverge the more potential value is created in the customer's mind.



What should be talked about with the customer?

The customer is interested in his/her own pains and preferences. Conversation topics that evolve from them work as the path to value sources. Talking about the right things and using the right terms opens the door to the customer's world to the issues that are significant to the customer.

CUSTOMER HIRES PRODUCT TO GET JOB DONE!



What is the job the customer handles?

Harvard Business School's Professor, Clayton Christensen, presented the idea of the customer's "job to be handled" in his book called The Innovator's Solution, in 2003. The idea is simple:



"There is no point selling the customer products or services but instead help him/her handle their job"

The idea is not completely new as already in the 1960s a Marketing Professor from the same school, Theodore Levitt, said:

"People don't want to buy a quarter inch drill but instead they want a quarter inch hole."

When you understand which job you can help the customer with, you also understand what you should discuss with the customer. Customers have very different jobs; needs to be satisfied. Note that the same need can be satisfied in multiple ways.

What jobs does the customer want to handle and

what type of pains are involved in handling them. What sort of benefit or relief is the customer aiming for? What would make the customer happier?

Is the customer stupid when they don't buy?

Pointing out a rational and easily measurable value is the intriguing way of trying to argue your own suggestion to the customer. This involves the risk of falling in to traditional arguing. If we are able to prove to the customer without buts, why he/she should not just agree to our suggestion, shouldn't just agree to our suggestion we are dangerously close to being back at square one.

In the same way as product features and service content these clearly presentable benefit calculations come together in the customer's mind and head. Due to the nature of the value, explicit value is rarely there. Value is more or less experienced. What things look like and feel like depends on the perspective.

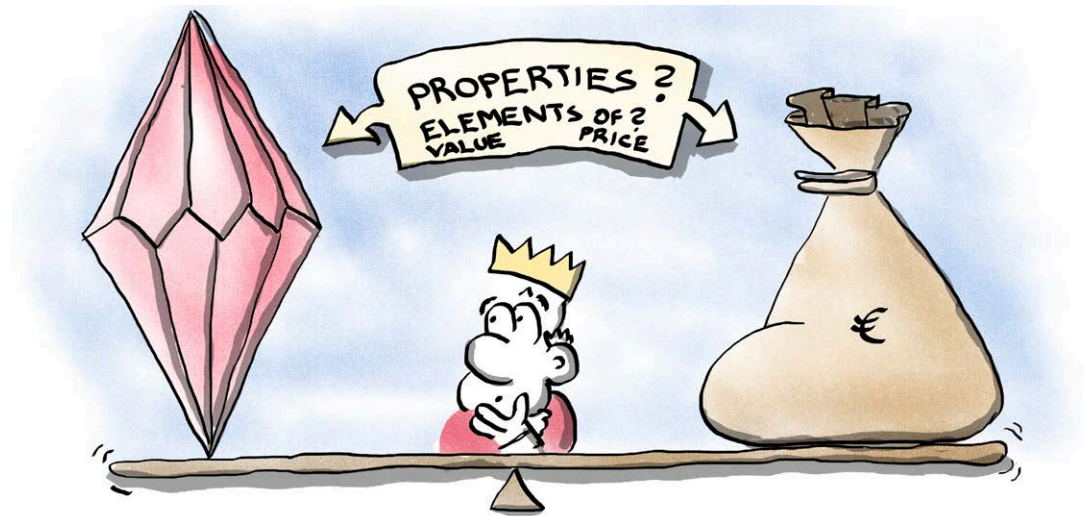
At the sources of value

Value can be sought with the customer from two directions:

- How to add something good and nice?
- How to remove something unpleasant and difficult?

In practice, this is done easiest with the help of a good topic for discussions as well as appropriate questions.

Understanding the concept of Value for Customer



FROM THE CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE



WHAT IS...

...VALUE ?

...PRICE ?

What does the customer think about Value and Price?

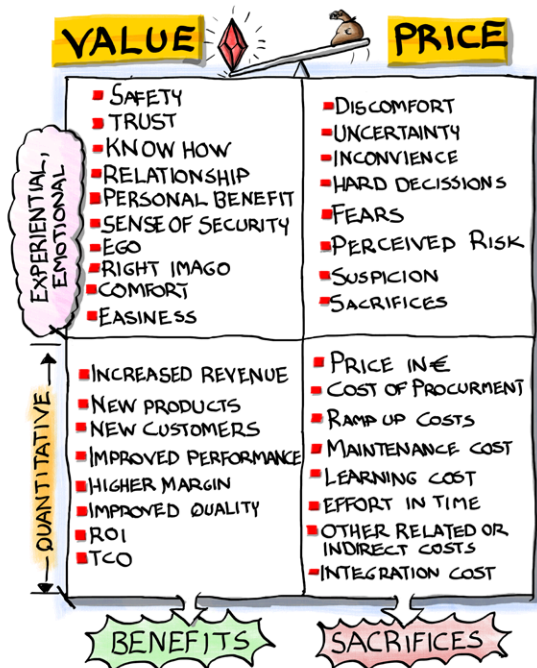
When the customer is making a decision, he may often consider these two items and their relation to each other. How do they appear to the customer? What is Value, and what is Price?

Discuss in your groups about properties and attributes of value? How would you define both, and what examples of Price and Value can you point out?

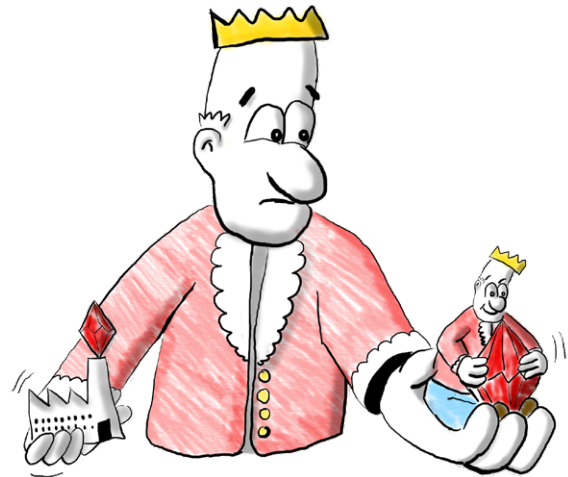
Collect your findings to one flip-chart and prepare to discuss them with others..

Experiential vs. Quantitative Price & Value

At the moment of decision, We can analyze customers' views about value and price from two different perspectives; measurable and experienced value & price. Experiential elements of value and price are much harder to measure. They are based on feelings and often not consciously analyzed. For example, How would you quantify uncertainty, fear, or feeling trust? They play a significant role when the customer is making a decision.



Could you give examples of what are typical experienced elements of the value and price of your average customer? What role do these factors play in her decision making?



Personal vs. Organisational value

Value perceived by customer should be substantially bigger than sacrifices she/he have to make to get it. When analysing this it is good to remember that there are always two versions of value and price, personal and organisational.

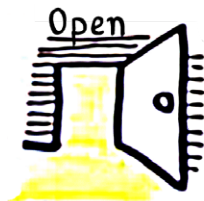
When making decision customer is thinking..

- What does this mean to me?
- What do I have to do?
- What type of risk am I taking here?
- What if everything does not go well?
- What will I gain?
- What will my organization gain?
- How can I explain this to my boss?
- How will I rationalize this decision to others?

Customer is going through comparable from an organizational perspective, but that happens after personal effects have been analyzed. If these two perspectives contradict, individuals will typically win.

Using Questions..

- Questions help steer the meeting
- Are used to identify and develop needs
- Directs discussion to the desired direction
- Helps customer to have another angle or viewpoint
- Helps us to see the situation from the customer angle
- To show respect, interest, and empathy
- To show interest in customer situation and needs
- To show our expertise
- Build up credibility and trust



Question?



Open questions

These questions start with who, what, why, where, when, and how. Open-ended questions encourage discussion about the given topic and help customer to explain their situations in their own words and perspective.

Open-ended questions are excellent tools to find out new information. Correctly used, they are potent sales tools to help us understand customer situations, needs, and potential of value creation. An open question is easy to identify as it typically begins with a question word, and it can be answered in multiple and unpredictable ways.

Closed questions can only be answered from the predefined set of alternatives like yes or no. Closed questions do not encourage the discussion; either they won't uncover new information. Closed questions are used to confirm our current understanding of the situation.

Closed questions should be used with care as you may easily miss essential pieces of information by closing your questions to support your pre-existing understanding. Unfortunately, usually, the first question that comes to mind is the closed one. With little practice, it is relatively easy to convert closed questions to open one by adding question words to the beginning of the question and removing the verb.

Closed questions

Silence as a question

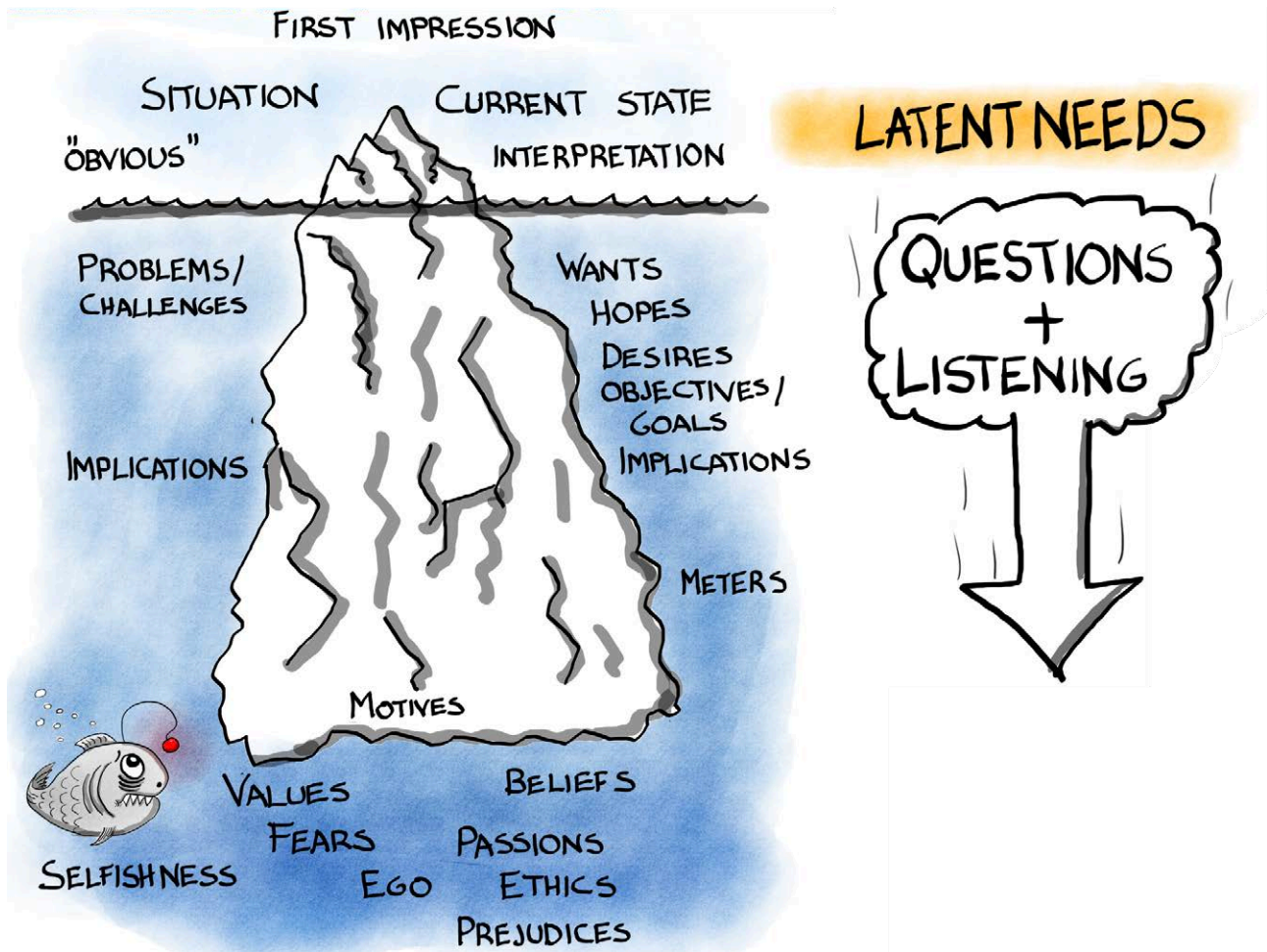
Silence can be a very effective question, especially if the first answer is inadequate. By merely being silent a few seconds after the customer has answered your questions will encourage her to supplement her response with additional information.

Bad questions

Questions that may prevent discussion are:

- Leading "Wasn't it so that you did " or "Isn't that too difficult
- Marathon unclear, too long, inaccurate questions
- Multiple many questions in same sentence. Ask one at the time!
- Unclear difficult to understand, unclear questions
- Rhetoric questions that are not questions or supposed to be answered.

Understanding latent needs



Your first impression is rarely complete

Most of the things and phenomena conceal much more than initially are visible. Discussion with new people begins typically with easy and often apparent topics, topics that are easy and socially acceptable to cover. Few of us will voluntarily and immediately reveal our inner thoughts and feelings to people that we barely know.

Focus and questions build trust

Discussing essential and delicate topics requires trust and time between the parties.

To better understand customers' pains, dreams, desires, fears, and value, you need to dive deeper to find it. It takes time and a good set of questions combined with soft delivery and a genuine desire to understand the other party.

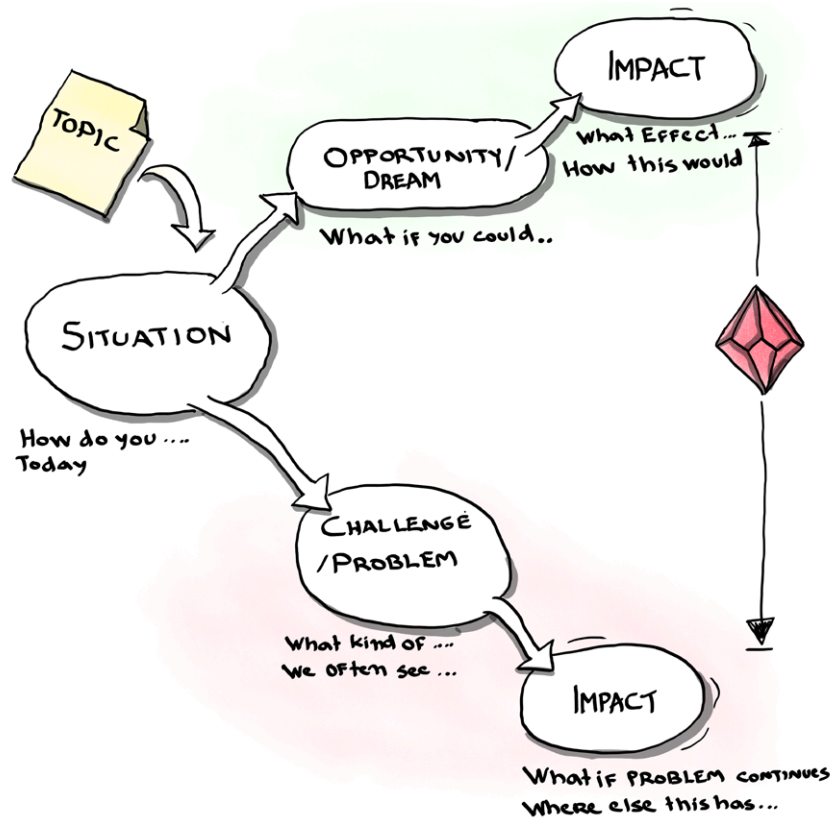
The best tool to broaden your understanding is to use the right questions and follow-up questions to gain that information. The best tools are questions about the implications of pains and gains. Who or what is affected, should the problem persist similarly what will happen if the dream is fulfilled.

Talking about topics of customer's interest and using the right questions is a great way to build rapport. They help you to gain a greater understanding of the customer's perception of value. Keeping your focus on another party of conversation will help you to build trust as people generally are very keen to talk about themselves should someone dare to ask something.

Be patient

To get deep enough understanding requires training and the ability to keep enquiring instead of solving obvious customer needs immediately when seeing something familiar. Most of us tend to have a bad habit of jumping to conclusions way too early, thus solving the wrong or incomplete problem or dream.

It takes time and patience to build a good picture of your client's inner mind. This discussion may well be the first opportunity for another party to name some of their fears, desires on a conscious level, thus provide an opportunity to learn something new about oneself..



Discussion model to understand need and value

The easiest way to understand what value we might be able to create for the customer is to use questions. The above structure will help you to create a deeper understanding of the customer's perspective and what is boiling below the surface. When trying to understand what is essential for the customer and what implications they might expect are afraid of will significantly help you to create value for the customer.

The typical discussion will start by understanding where the customer sees themselves today. What is

their current situation? You may then continue either direction - What improvement customer might seek and why? Or You may dig to current or future challenges and their implications?

Both directions will help you to see what drives the customer's view of value. Better you under the implications better you will fully understand what customer truly needs. Asking about customer vision, positive or negative, is one of the most challenging questions to ask but, at the same time, the most effective ones to build value, trust, and relationship.
