My Uncle Sven

Sales Success Factors — Hint: it's not just about personality

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I enjoy reading stories that illuminate a topic from entirely different perspectives and use storytelling. Then I decided to write such a story myself and share it with you. In this case, the topic is ***sales****. The story is based on my own family and is genuine. Even if sales isn't your field, you may enjoy reading this story. You'll learn basic sales methodologies.*

The simplest possible sales process model?

As the title implies, this story is about Uncle Sven.

In fact, I had two uncles called Sven: my uncle Sven Östberg, who was my father's younger brother; and my uncle Sven Monell, who was the husband of my mother's sister. They both worked in sales throughout their careers. In terms of personality, they were as different as could be. Their lives were also completely different. Yet they were both successful salespeople.

My two Uncle Sven — both salesmen.

Sven Östberg: The Analytic Salesman

My uncle Sven Östberg.

Sven Östberg (1933–1997) was an academically gifted student who consistently achieved top grades in STEM subjects, including mathematics, chemistry, and physics. However, he performed less well in communicative subjects such as languages, earning a pass. He won chess tournaments, yet he rarely spoke to anyone. At the age of 19, he developed a mental illness that diminished his ambition in life. Nevertheless, he pursued a career in sales. He also studied to become a bank clerk, passing the exam with excellent grades in all 11 subjects. However, he never secured a position at a bank. Instead, he sold food, petrol, and other merchandise at his mother's general store in the countryside.

Uncle Sven and my grandmother in their country store in the late 1950s.

He knew all the regular customers very well and was highly successful. Customers who had no money could buy food on credit — those were the times. Sven successfully balanced the company's debt and profits. Accurate bookkeeping and effective relationship management were his keys to success. The retail store remained profitable for forty years, until the customer base in this rural area eventually became too small to sustain it.

Uncle Sven's Sales Success Factors

- Managing excellent relations with customers and suppliers

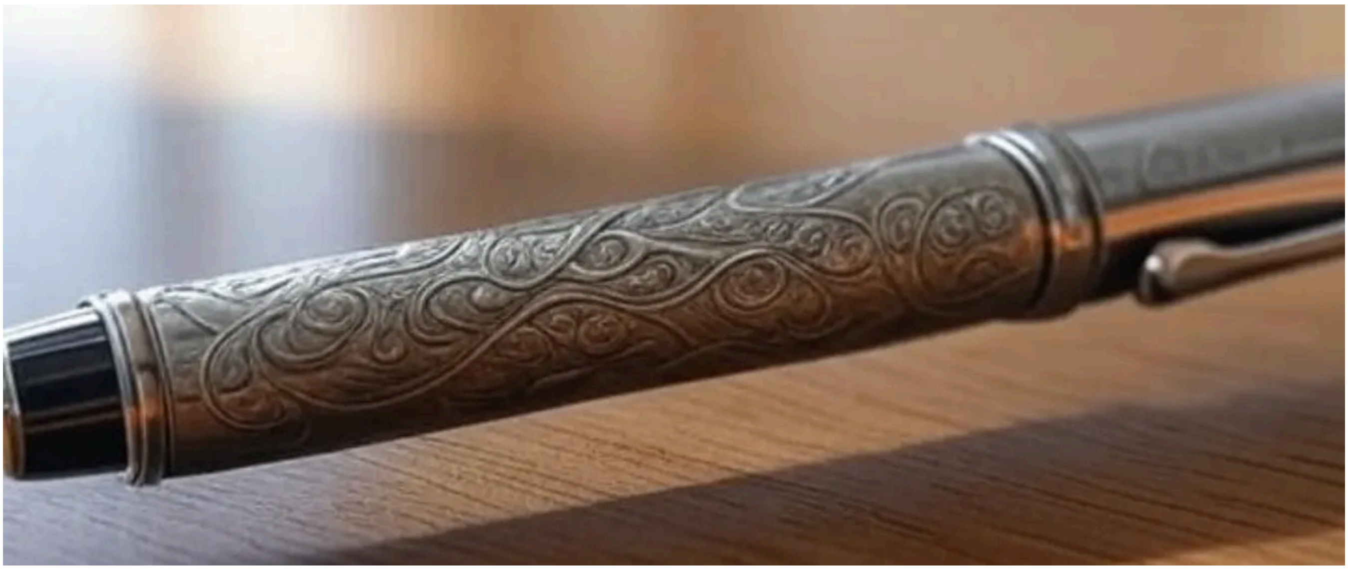
- Keeping books accurately
- Collecting payment on time with sensitivity

Sven Monell: The Charismatic Salesman

Personality-wise, my other uncle was quite the opposite.

My uncle Sven Monell.

Sven Monell (1917–2006) was a charismatic individual with a background in sport and the military. A strongman with extraordinary self-confidence, he could flex every muscle. He could sell you anything. I'm not kidding. He was very talkative and persuasive.



He sold me this pen.

Sven Monell — a master of sales

Uncle Sven could:

- Show you why you need it — creating your interest
- Let you touch and feel it — making you experience it for yourself
- Make the complex feel simple — turning you from a sceptic into a believer
- Encourage you to buy it — performing the sale
- Make you happy with your purchase — making you come back

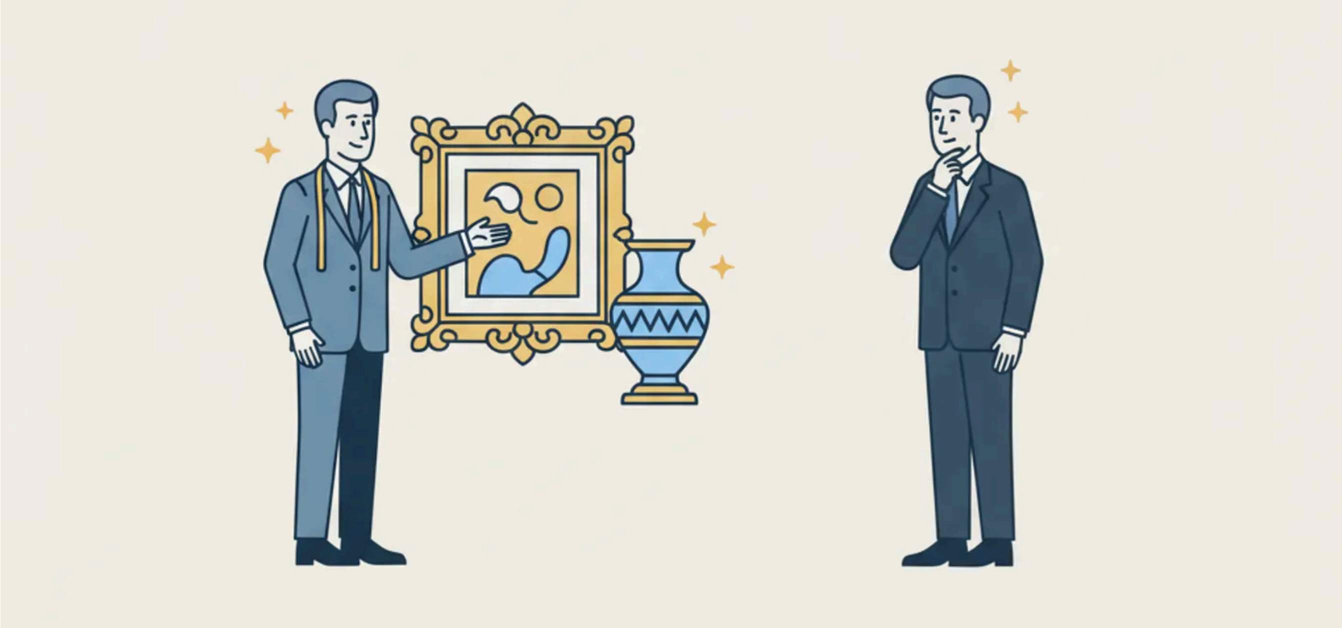
Uncle Sven's changing careers
After his elite sports career and his employment as a military officer, Uncle Sven began his long sales career.

For decades in the middle of the last century, he worked as a salesman of men's clothing at the most famous department store in Stockholm, Sweden, Nordiska Kompaniet, or NK for short.

Uncle Sven as haberdasher

He could immediately see which clothes would suit customers and what size they were upon entering the store. He used the sales technique we nowadays call traditional goods sales with great success. He sold customers suits, coats, and shoes that they never thought they needed or wanted. In fact, he could sell any item to anyone at any time. He had practiced every hour, every day, for years. He was an expert in selling goods.

Uncle Sven as antiques trader
Living in fashionable quarters in central Stockholm, he ended his career selling expensive art and antiques to millionaires. That was not so difficult for him, and he made a small fortune.



His approach was like this.

Traditional goods sales

Uncle Sven knew that a buyer does not purchase the product itself, but rather what it can do for them. Therefore, he had to describe more than just the technical or physical characteristics of the product. It is about presenting a value proposition. He highlights the product's qualities and advantages, trying to convince the customer to make a purchase. He offers value. As the salesperson, he leaves the needs analysis to the buyer. Of course, it is essential to listen carefully to the customer's requirements, needs, and wishes. However, the product presentation is based mainly on assumptions; the salesperson does not solve problems for the customer and cannot provide significant customization of the product.

According to this classic model, the product presentation should consist of four steps.

Step 1 — State a feature of the product that the customer can see, feel, and verify.

Step 2 — Describe an advantage that the feature provides. It must be a logical and credible advantage.

Step 3 — Describe the significance of the benefit, giving examples of how the product should benefit the customer, create value, and add value.

Step 4 — Ask an acceptance question that "locks in" the customer by confirming that their requirements, needs, and wishes are being met.

If the answer to the acceptance question is negative, repeat imperceptibly with another feature.

This sales technique remains highly effective for goods and objects, applicable to everything from clothing to real estate and antiques. And pens. It is utilized by successful salespeople worldwide.

The type of salesperson using this sales methodology is sometimes referred to somewhat disparagingly as a crocodile, characterized by a big mouth, sharp teeth, and small ears.

Perhaps Uncle Sven looked a little bit like a crocodile… just a bit.

Uncle Sven's Sales Success Factors

- Using his fantastic knowledge of people and how individuals should be treated in the best way possible
- Seeing the value chain instantly — feature → advantage → benefit → value
- Being able to subtly convince and close the deal, making the customer happy with their purchase

Uncle Sven on a new mission

My uncle Sven left NK sometime in the 1970s and started working as a salesman for a company, Sonab Communications AB, that sold wireless pager systems to industries. Sonab, originally a high-fidelity (HiFi) equipment manufacturer, was a pioneer in this technology before mobile telephony became available to the general public. There was a great need for internal communication in companies and businesses, and pagers were a vital tool for workplaces and factories that required quick staff contact.

Pagers, not pens.

Even though he was an expert in selling goods, Uncle Sven failed at this task. At the customer meetings, he couldn't just sell them the pagers; he had to understand their entire workflow and how the system would integrate with it. Here, it was about solution sales, which required some dimensioning, configuration, and adaptation. It was also a business-to-business (B2B) transaction involving larger investments that affected the organization.

The classic sales techniques Uncle Sven excelled at were ineffective when it came to system sales or solution sales. He did not master the consultative sales technique required for this situation. Selling here is an entirely different way of thinking and working, and requires extensive training.

Now, to the sales methodology Uncle Sven should have used. We need a sales methodology that focuses less on transactions and instead starts building a longer, more transformative relationship of mutual value.

Classic consultative selling

When selling professional services on a project basis or a customer solution (a customized combination of goods and services) that tailors the offer to solve the customer's problems, traditional product-selling techniques are ineffective. Feature-Advantage-Benefit (FAB) analysis is effective in product marketing for an intended customer group and in tactical procurement tenders, but not in solution sales conversations. Instead, you have to sell in a consultative manner.

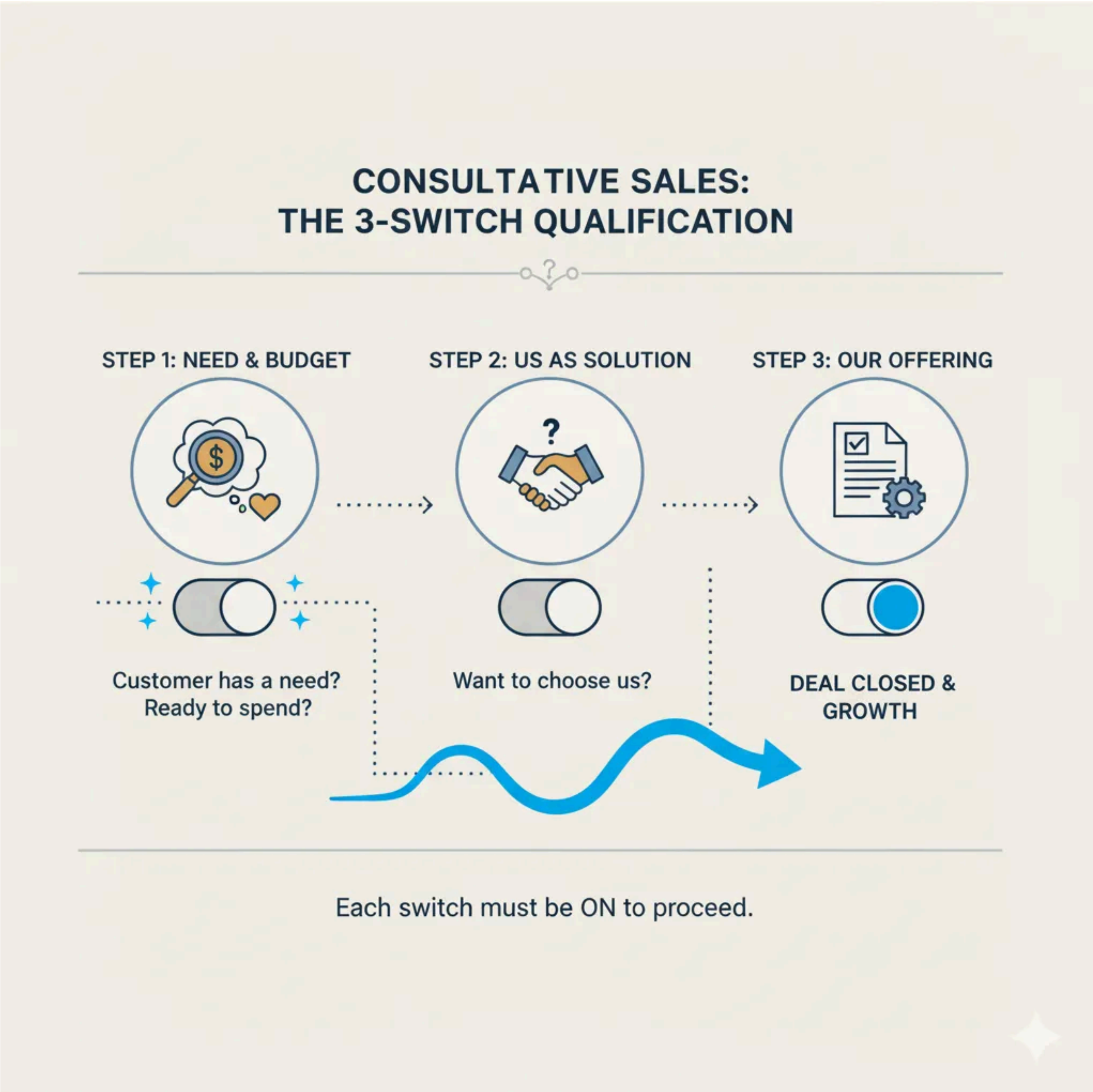
When selling in a consultative manner, you begin by asking open-ended questions and listening actively to the customer's responses. It is the customer's needs that dictate everything, and you need to capture them.

The salesperson conducts the needs analysis together with the client or buyer. As the salesperson, you only decide what to offer the customer after you have found out precisely what the customer wants to buy from you.

This also means that you, as a salesperson, and your prospective customer qualify each other during the sales conversation. Try to build rapport and genuine trust.

This type of salesperson is sometimes referred to somewhat disparagingly as a rabbit, characterized by big ears, a soft demeanor, and a small mouth.

According to the classic consultative sales technique, leads should be qualified in three steps, each involving a switch. Only proceed to the next step if you receive confirmation that the switch can be turned on. Always assume the switch is off until it is confirmed on.



Step 1 — First switch:

Determine if your prospective customer is ready to purchase a solution that fulfills a specific need.

- Does the customer have a need that needs to be fulfilled? It's the customer's perceived and experienced needs that are interesting, rather than their actual needs.
- Is the customer ready to seek outside help?
- Is the customer prepared to spend money? Do they have a budget for external help? Is the customer representative authorized to make a purchasing decision?

If the switch is ON, i.e., the answers to the above questions feel okay, proceed to step 2.

Step 2 — Second switch:

Check who your prospective customer has in mind to help them.

- Who does the customer want to turn to, based on previous experience?
- Are we on their mind? Does the customer want to use us? Choose us?

If the switch is ON, i.e., the answers to the above questions feel okay, proceed to step 3.

Step 3 — Third switch:

See how we can assist our customers.

- Specifically, what can we do to fulfill the customer's needs?
- What is the customer willing to pay for?
- Can we design a suitable offering? What are the appropriate products (goods and/or services), scope, staffing, deliverables, and pricing?

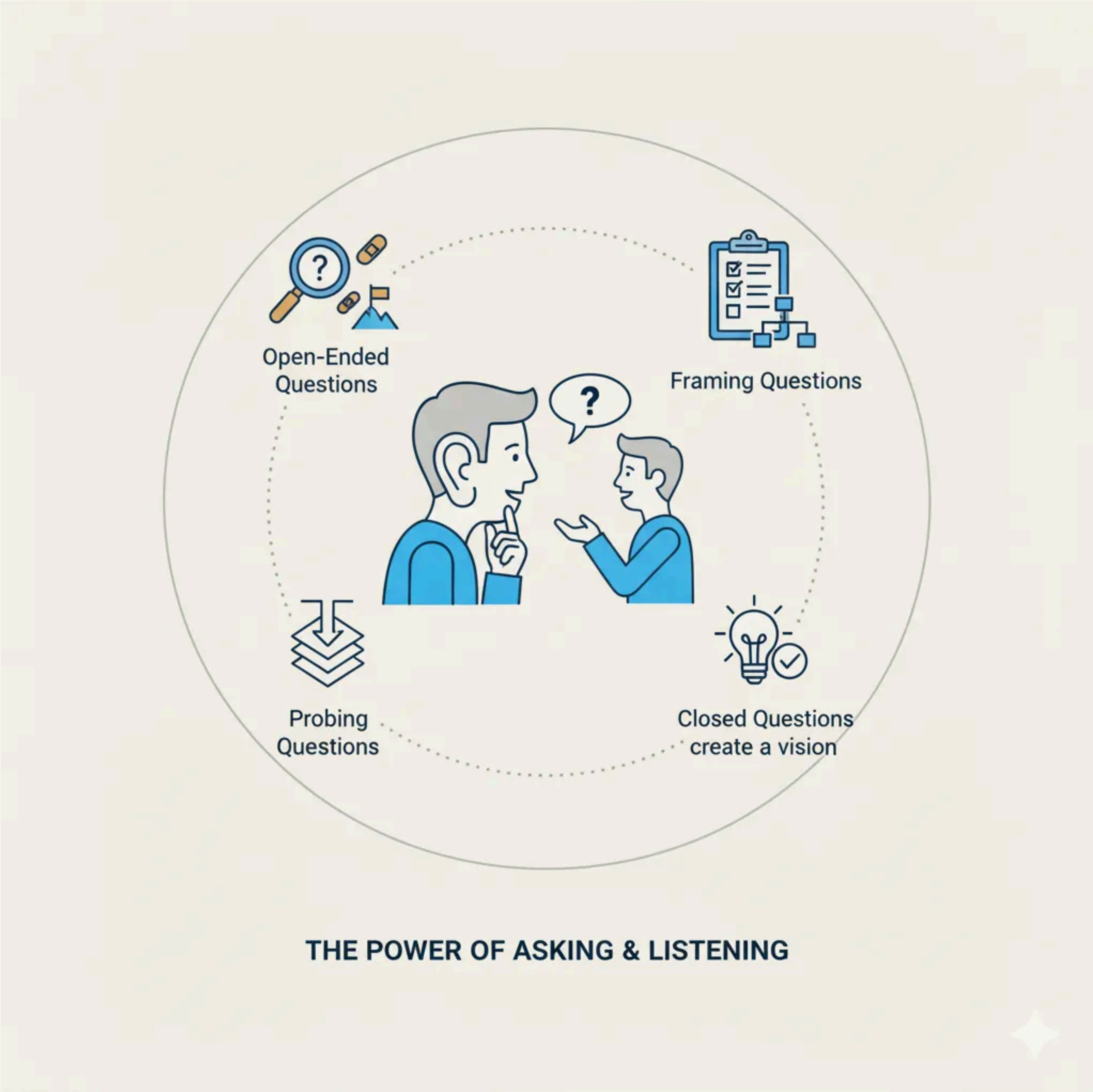
If the switch is ON, i.e., the answers to the above questions are satisfactory, proceed, make the right offer, and bring to a close.

Important!

- Don't assume anything about what or how the customer thinks about anything at all.
- Don't provide any solutions immediately.
- In fact, never be the first to tell anything!
- A pro tip: To define the customer need to focus on, look for pain points, i.e., where it hurts. You want to identify the concerns that keep the customer awake at night. That's where you start digging for issues that you identify, quantify, qualify, and isolate. When you guide the customer visionize, you may let the customer self-prioritize between the problems.

How you ask the questions is essential.

Ask the right questions and let the customer tell and explain. Listen actively.



- Ask open-ended questions to understand customer pain points and goals. This will help you define the customer need to focus on.
- Ask framing questions to gather information about the customer's current situation and define their problems.
- Ask probing questions to find out more details.
- Ask closed questions to help create a vision.
- To listen actively means engaging all your senses, and active listening is sometimes also referred to as non-verbal listening. In addition to really listening and focusing on what the customer is saying based on their perspective, values, and wishes — and learning with curiosity and without judgment — we notice and

adapt to changes in body language (such as gestures, posture, and facial expressions), voice (such as emphasis, tone, rhythm, tempo, volume), emotions, and intuitive images. We also notice the impact that our words have on the person in focus.

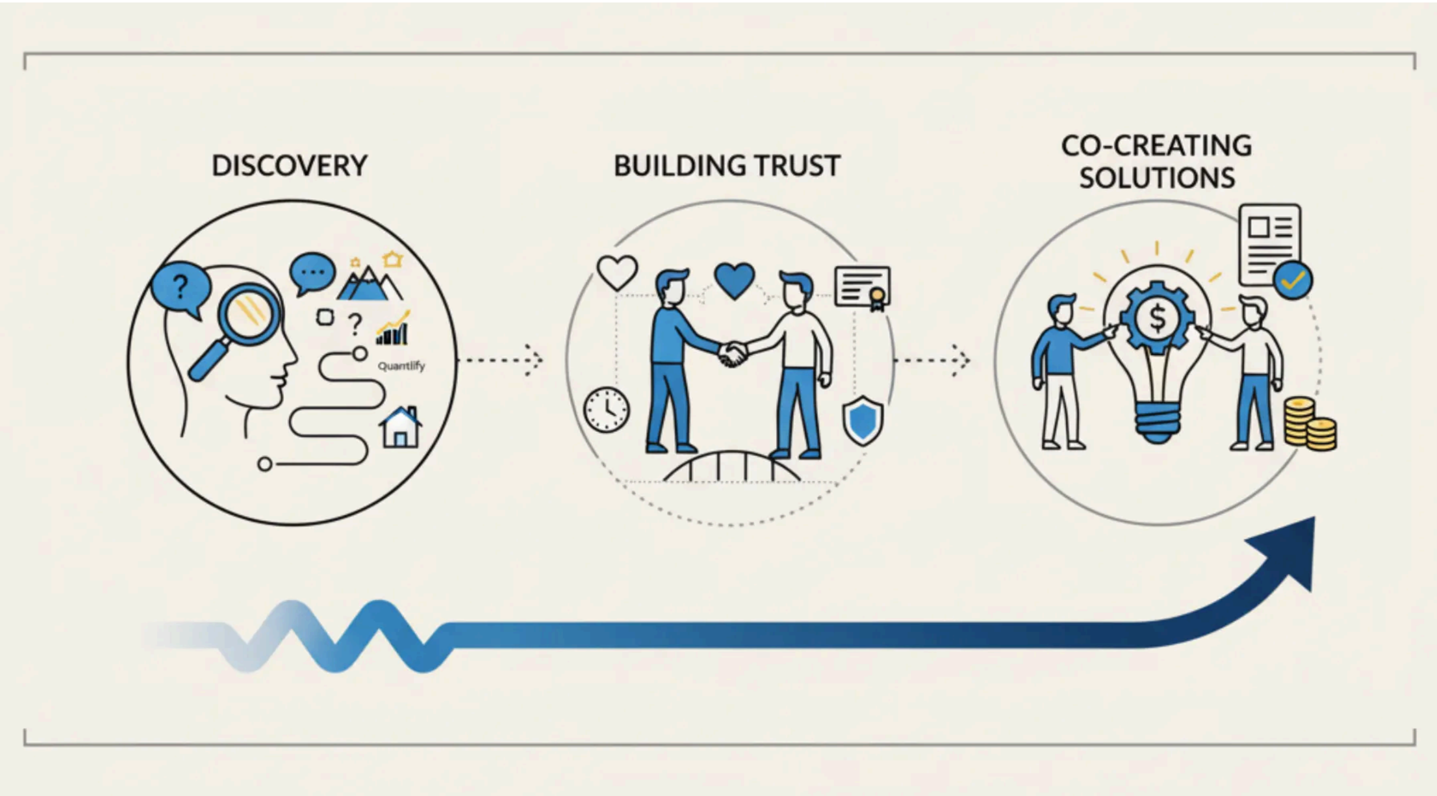
The Sales Success Factors Uncle Sven should have employed

- Starting every sales process with genuine curiosity, asking open-ended questions, and listening actively to uncover the customer's real pain points and needs.

- Building trust and rapport through empathy, patience, and a focus on creating long-term mutual value rather than quick wins.
- Co-designing tailored solutions together with the customer, ensuring that the offering truly addresses their problems and priorities, and guiding them step by step toward a shared vision.

Summary — consultative selling

- Begin each sales meeting as a journey of discovery, where you curiously explore the customer's everyday life and challenges. Identify and quantify the customer's most critical pain points through structured conversations. Ask the right questions and listen actively.
- Create security by becoming a partner who understands the customer's world better than they do themselves. Establish a trusting relationship based on professionalism, transparency, and a long-term perspective. Build trust by building relationships.
- Let the solution emerge together, so that the customer feels it is their own — then the purchase becomes obvious. Design and present a tailored value proposition that shows a clear ROI for the customer. Tailor the solution to meet the customer's specific needs and budget.



Consultative Selling of Services, Systems and Solutions.

Bonus — Pro Sales Tip: For Retainer-Based Consulting

When selling **retainer-based advisory services**, the rules change. This is not staffing. It's not a project with a fixed scope. It's a long-term relationship.

The golden rule: **don't sell — pull instead of push.** Wait until the customer requests help before presenting any offer.

When they do, start small. A low-risk, easy-to-buy contract. This is the classic **"land and expand" strategy.**

Structure the offer as *business assistance* with a clear value statement and a price — often a monthly subscription paid in advance. Price it based on the problem's value and the customer's willingness to pay.

The exact service content? Define it together **after signing.** The scope will evolve anyway.

Deliver well, nurture the relationship — and larger, recurring orders will follow naturally.

The initial monthly retainer is the foundation (land), but the real upside comes from variable project fees, driven by the value you create (expand).

Advanced consulting pro sales tip for retainer-based advisory services with a value add-on.

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About the Author

Gunnar Östberg, Business Transformation Architect, CEO, Business Clarity.

Gunnar is an M.Sc. computer engineer with 40 years of experience in **business and IT-driven transformation.** He has worked with global giants like Ericsson and Scania, as well as nimble high-tech firms. Passionate about sound architectural principles and systems thinking, Gunnar writes to expand perspectives and deepen insight. Through his consultancy, Business Clarity, Gunnar helps organizations evolve ideas into sustainable systems and products, and transform the business through structured, principle-based innovation. His focus areas include pragmatic architecture, business modeling, and delivering real impact.

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