



COVER STORY

Are you asking the right questions?

Are you listening to the answers?

By Gerry Morris

Asking questions conveys a message to your customers that you care about their needs. Asking the right questions – and taking care to listen to the answers – can be the determining factor of whether you or your competitor gets the sale.

People will pay more to do business with someone that cares enough to focus on their needs. Be aware of the importance of comfortable sleep to your customers' health and quality of life, and understand the significance of

your influence in the mattress buying process.

Your conversation should be a series of questions and answers, a give and take between you and your customer. Make sure that you don't simply follow a scripted list of qualifiers, but that you gather and provide information that gives direction and leads your customer to buying the set that is best suited for them.

This story offers specific questions to try. But the main point is to encourage you to incorporate creative, intuitive and responsive questions into the selling process.

COVER STORY

asking the right questions

Stop, look & listen

In an effort to “make the sale,” it’s easy – and habit forming – to be so concerned with what you are saying that you don’t hear what the customer has to say. Slow down, look at your customers while they talk, and even repeat some of their answers back to them. You may want to take a few notes. Pause and consider before you start talking again. There is insight to be gained by understanding what their answers mean. This approach creates a more pleasant and relaxed atmosphere for all involved.

you may encounter. Either way, thank them for shopping with you.

One of the best disarming questions is “How do you feel about buying (not ‘shopping for’) a new mattress?” More than likely, they will confess to being confused and less than enthusiastic. You can empathize by saying that you understand and know how to help find the set that is right for them. Then try “In order to do that, I will ask you a lot of questions and also take the time to answer all of yours.” Recently, after hearing a similar statement, a weary shopper

gives each partner eight inches less sleeping space than a twin.”

“Why are you buying a new set?” is better than the popular “What’s wrong with the set you have now?” because it assumes that they will buy from you, but in a non-direct manner. Also, they may be buying for a different reason. Asking how long they have had the set will indicate its quality and let you know if you need to spend more time explaining support and durability.

“Do you sleep on your back, side or stomach?” “Does your shoulder or back hurt when you wake up?” “How many hours do you sleep each night?” These inquiries imply a thorough evaluation and will make the customer feel more confident about buying from you.



“Are you familiar with all of the different comfort levels that are available now? Let me show you.”

SELECTION:

Choices, choices, choices

Instead of asking what type of feel or comfort he or she is looking for, try “Are you familiar with all of the different comfort levels that are available now? Let me show you.” Then ask “Which of these is most similar to yours? Did you sleep comfortably on it for the first few years? What did you like about the set?” Pay close attention to the answers – they are the key to selecting the right set for them. If your customers are accustomed to a firm set, selling them a pillow-top may not be the best choice and vice versa.

Getting people to lie down on a mattress is not always easy. Try asking them to sit on it first. They will be much less intimidated, and it is an easier step to get them to lie down from there. When they do, ask “Is that the position you sleep in? Did you realize that most people don’t really get the feel of a new mattress until it is in their home? Did you realize that if you keep a mattress 10 years, you will sleep on it for nearly 3 years? We

GREETING:

Hey, I’m on your side!

People shopping for any ‘need’ product tend to have their defenses up. Establishing rapport can help disarm shoppers who are seeking that elusive best value.

Do you ask your customer’s name? You should. Repeat it back to them and use it. But don’t overuse it. Try asking about something unrelated to mattresses, maybe something of current or of local interest, but nothing controversial like “Who are you voting for?” Use discretion.

Ask “Have you shopped with us before?” If they have, it would indicate their satisfaction and can increase your confidence. If they haven’t, ask if they have shopped for bedding elsewhere. These will help you identify possible obstacles

responded by saying “You’re the first person that’s cared about me. Everyone else was just bragging about what great prices they had.”

QUALIFYING:

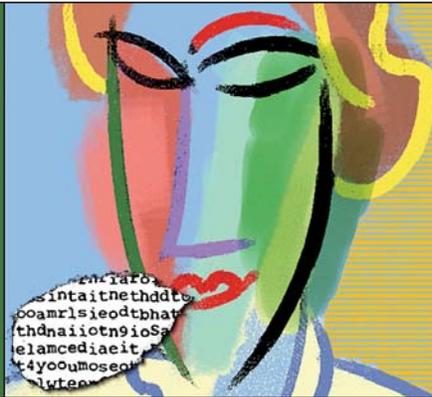
Who, what, when, where & why?

Qualifying questions are designed to gather basic facts such as who the bed is for, what size, etc., and are essential to getting started. Try a different twist from the standard questions and watch how you can open up new possibilities. Instead of “What size are you looking for?” try “What size have you been sleeping on?” If they have a full or queen, you can ask “Have you ever slept on a king size set?” or “Have you considered stepping up to a larger size? Did you realize that a king is equivalent to two twins in width? A queen

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like to make sure you buy the one that is most comfortable to you.”

To help his customers make the right choice, one successful salesperson I know asks “If you had to spend the night here, which one would you sleep on? Well, that’s the one you should buy!”

Asking how much a customer wants to spend is not recommended. Few customers will say \$2,199! What if they say \$200? Once they say a figure, it’s awkward to go above it.

Asking which brand they own is not always the best question either. If they liked their old set, remember the brand and it’s not one you carry...uh oh. It’s not vital information for you to help them find a new set, and many people can’t remember anyway.

OBJECTIONS:

Try raising them yourself

What if you raise objections instead of waiting for the customer to raise them? This is a wonderful opportunity to increase the likelihood your customer will be satisfied with the purchase and less likely to return it.

Turn the objections into questions: “What are your expectations for a new set?” “How long do you think a set should last?” “Are you familiar with body impressions?” “Would it bother you to see indentations where you sleep?” “Do you know what a warranty covers?” “Do you think

this bed may be too tall for your headboard or too thick for your sheets?”

This is a great way to find out misconceptions, expectations and concerns and address them in an informative and positive way. Getting these issues out of the way will give your customer confidence in their choice.

CLOSING:

An end, not a technique

More than likely, you already have closing questions that you use: “When would you like this delivered?” “Is this the set you want us to deliver?” “Do you agree that this seems like the best set for you?” “How would you like to pay?”

But if you have to resort to heavy-handed or manipulative closing ‘techniques,’ it’s probably an indication that there are still unanswered questions in the customer’s mind. Incorporating effective questions throughout the selling process can help make the customer ready to buy and make closing a mere formality. ●

Turn the page for “Mattress questions that work”...

Go for the add-on

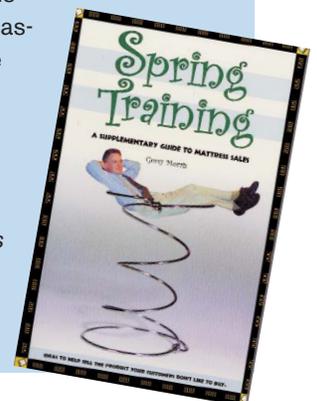
When you’re selling mattresses, chances are you have built-in opportunities for add-on sales that can add to the bottom line. So don’t forget to ask the questions: “What type of frame do you currently have under your bed?” “Does your current frame have center support?” “Are you aware that an improper frame can void the warranty?” “Do you have a good mattress pad that will protect your new mattresses?” “Will your sheets fit your new mattress?” “How long has it been since you replaced your pillows?”

One of the greatest ways to increase business, if you are selling other furniture, is to ask every non-bedding customer about their mattress. Tell them that your store cares about its customers and you want to make sure they are sleeping well. “Are you getting the good night’s sleep you really deserve?”

Always be sure to ask your mattress customers if anyone else in their family needs a mattress, now or in the future. Ask if they have any other needs such as guest bedroom, vacation house, etc.

One retail store survey revealed that 40% of their customers bought a mattress set within two days of purchasing bedroom furniture...but from a competitor! If you’re not asking the question, you’re losing out.

Gerry Morris is the author of *Spring Training: A Supplementary Guide to Mattress Sales* (see ad in Showcase) and president of Inner Spring, a training and consulting firm. Gerry has 18 years experience as a bedding manufacturers’ representative. For more information, visit www.innerspring.net, e-mail Gerry at gmmorris@innerspring.net or call (903)456-2015.



Mattress questions that work

By Craig McAndrews

The art of asking the right questions and knowing how to respond to the answers will have the most significant impact on the results a bedding sales associate is able to produce. Here are some that I recommend:

Opening questions

- Have you been into our store before?
- What brought you into our store today?
- Were you fortunate enough to see our ad in the paper today?
- Have you been shopping around? Have you seen anything out there that you liked?
- What type of mattress are you currently sleeping on?
- Do you understand the difference between comfort and support?

Needs assessment questions

- How old is your current sleep set?
- Are you sleeping comfortably on your current sleep set?
- How long has it been since you have had a good night's sleep?
- What types of problems are you experiencing with your current set?
- Are you experiencing aches and pains when you wake up in the morning?
- Have you ever slept on a mattress that you really liked? What was it you liked about it?
- Do you currently have any health concerns that would contribute to your not sleeping well?
- How much sleep, on average, do you get a night?
- Between you and your spouse, who has the most trouble sleeping?

Use assessment questions

- Are you looking for a bed for you? Guestroom? Child's room?
- How long would you like your new bed to last?
- How often will the bed be slept on?
- In what position do you mostly sleep – back, side or stomach? How about your spouse?
- What are you looking for in a mattress?

Craig McAndrews is the co-founder of Retail Executive Planning and a developer of the Retail Learning Center. His company provides training material and consulting services specifically designed for bedding retailers. For additional information, visit www.repllc.com. Contact Craig in Phoenix at (602)327-3261 or by e-mail at craig@repllc.com.

My favorite five

If I could only choose five questions to be used in every bedding sales presentation, it would be these:

1 How long would you like your new bed to last?

This question establishes the quality of product the consumer should be considering, as well as providing the bedding associate with a guideline on how much importance the consumer is attaching to their new bed.

2 How long has it been since you have had a good night's sleep?

This question begins to develop the need in the eyes of the consumer (they really begin to wonder – how long has it been?). It also provides the bedding associate insight as to how poor their current sleeping situation may be.

3 Between you and your spouse, who has the most trouble sleeping?

This question helps in determining who will be the key decision maker in relation to the comfort of the product. Although both spouses may participate in the final buying decision, the one who has the biggest issue with the bed will determine which product best meets their need.

4 How do you sleep – back, side, stomach? In what position do you mostly sleep?

This question will provide the bedding associate insight as to which type of surface comfort the consumer might prefer (firm, plush or pillow-top). Although it is never safe to assume what the consumer would like, sleeping position in general has an impact on the type of surface a consumer would prefer.

5 Do you currently have any health concerns that would contribute to your not sleeping well?

This question provides insight as to how sensitive the consumer may be to the performance of the product. There are some health problems that are difficult to solve even with a new sleep set. If associates can understand the consumers' expectations of the bedding set performance, they are better able to provide information and products that deliver high quality results.