

## Determine a Customer's Needs

When a person walks into a store, she enters with a desire—conscious or subconscious—to purchase what that store is selling. Shoppers want to buy. Your job as a sales associate is to ensure that customers' needs are satisfied—to help them complete the buying process. Once you've established a friendly connection with a customer, your next challenge is to determine exactly what the customer needs—both goods and services. Many customers know exactly what they want. Others may have only a general idea. Some have nothing specific in mind, only the hope of finding something that will satisfy their desire to buy. The ultimate goal for you is the same for all these cases: to satisfy the customer.

Even if you are assisting a very independent shopper who has already found exactly what he was looking for, you can make a positive impression by taking care of unspoken needs. For example, you can ring up the sale promptly. You may also be able to provide product care advice, warranty information, a product booklet, directions to the next department the customer is looking for, etc. But mostly, these customers will appreciate immediate attention and efficient service.

You can become skillful at anticipating customer needs by gathering information about the customer in two ways: first, through careful observation; and second, by asking thoughtful questions.

**Knowing the questions to ask...**Customers may tell you what they want, but they will not always tell you why. If you ask the right questions, you can find out their buying motive, and thus improve your chances of satisfying customers and making sales. Ask searching questions to determine what the customer likes and needs. Then use your imagination. The customer searching for a baby gift may not know what types of gifts are appropriate. You can ask questions about the baby—age, whether it's a boy or girl, if it's a first-born, etc.—and then make helpful suggestions about clothing, nursery furnishings, books, or toys.

The customer looking for a VCR may be attracted by such features as ease of use or low price. Help the customer come to a decision by “tuning in” to help the customer narrow his focus. Most importantly, ask questions that encourage conversation. Questions beginning with *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *how*, and *why* will open doors. *Yes/no* questions are liable to close them.

### *Questions That Open Doors*

- *Who* are you shopping for?
- *Who* told you about our store?
- *What* brings you into the store today?
- *What* is the special occasion?
- *Where* have you seen one before?
- *Where* will it be used?
- *When* is the special occasion?
- *When* did you decide that you had to have one?
- *How* did you hear about us?
- *How* long have you been shopping for one?
- *Why* that specific model or brand?



## OPENING DOORS WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The best way to get customers talking is to ask *open-ended* questions.

When you ask customers *yes* or *no* questions, you don't get the whole story. You might learn *what* the customers want or don't want, but they do not reveal *why*. Open-ended questions invite customers to "tell more," which will help you learn more about their needs.

Compare the examples of dead-end and open-ended questions. Then turn the last few examples of dead-end questions into open-ended questions.

Dead-End	Open-Ended
➤ Can I help you?	➤ How can I help you?
➤ Do you like red or green?	➤ What color do you prefer?
➤ Is that the brand you want?	➤ Why do you prefer that brand?
➤ Is this for you, or is it a gift?	➤ For whom are you shopping?
➤ Did you want a full skirt?	➤ Which style skirt did you want?
➤ Do you want preset controls?	➤ What features are important to you?
➤ Is it for a special occasion?	➤ What's the special occasion?
➤ Looking for anything special?	➤ What are you looking for?
➤ Did you see our coupon specials?	➤ _____
	➤ _____
➤ Do you like 100 percent cotton?	➤ _____
	➤ _____

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