

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS & CLARIFYING CUSTOMER NEEDS

DETAILS

- **ESTIMATED TIME:** 45-60 Minutes
- **DELIVERY MODE:** Trainer-Led Instruction + Structured Practice + Scenario-Based Role-Playing
- **FACILITATOR:** General Manager or Designated Individual

VTM MATERIALS

- Trainier Activity Guide
- Mini-Scenario Sets #1 & 2
- Worksheet: How Do I Improve My Questions?

TRAINER'S ACTIONS & CHECKLIST

- Introduce why effective questioning is critical in uncovering customer needs.
- Lead the group through the Art of Questioning discussion. (Use the Trainer Explainer to help if needed)
- Facilitate workbook practice where team members strengthen weak questions.
- Run both Mini-Scenario Sets #1 and #2, ensuring:
 - Each team member completes at least two scenarios from each set
 - Everyone practices as both Sales Inspector and Customer when possible
- Observe team performance and provide real-time feedback on clarity, structure, and adaptability.
- Highlight opportunities to improve open-ended phrasing, follow-ups, and clarifiers.

FEEDBACK, VERIFYING, & ASSESSING

- **Trainer Review:** Evaluate how well team member apply open-ended questioning, use probing and clarifying prompts, adapt based on customer hesitation or tone, avoid closed, leading, confrontational, or "rushed" questions
- **Group Reflection:** Team members should share their work from the worksheet. Example Prompts:
 - ▶ Which improved question worked best?
 - ▶ What clarifier or follow-up did they add?
 - ▶ What did they notice in the customer's response that shaped their next question?

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP

Review the following:

- Notes & observation patterns
- Improvements in questioning style
- Strong examples surfaced during group practice

Team Member Reflection — Ask:

- How did your instinctive question compare to your improved version?*
- Which types of questions felt most natural?*
- Where do you want to improve next?*

- ★ **Encourage Adaptability:** Adjust questions to customer tone, hesitation, and engagement.
- ★ **Clarity Over Scripts:** Focus on intent and curiosity, not memorized lines.
- ★ **Strengthen Weak Questions:** Turn closed or leading phrasing into open, clarifying prompts.
- ★ **Use the Room:** Debrief as a group—compare approaches and share takeaways.

Getting Started & What To Do

General Notes:

- This activity follows a three-part progression:
 1. Group Discussion: The Art of Questioning
 2. Workbook Practice: Open-ended vs. Closed, Probing Questions, and Conversation Gaps
 3. Mini-Scenarios: Applying improved questioning in real conversations
- Allow enough time for the group to complete:
 - ▶ The discussion
 - ▶ All three workbook parts
 - ▶ At least two scenarios from each mini-scenario set
- Rotate roles so each team member practices:
 - ▶ Asking questions (SI role)
 - ▶ Responding as a customer
 - ▶ Providing peer feedback

During the Activity:

- Observe whether team members:
 - ▶ Convert closed questions into open ones
 - ▶ Use clarifiers and probing questions effectively
 - ▶ Adapt based on customer tone or hesitation
 - ▶ Avoid leading, rushed, or overly narrow questions
- Listen for opportunities to highlight good phrasing.
- Encourage note-taking before each group share-out.

After Each Practice Block:

- Ask quick reflection questions:
 - ▶ *What opened the conversation?*
 - ▶ *What closed it?*
 - ▶ *What clarifier or follow-up could you have added?*
- Reinforce strong examples and common patterns.

Step-by-Step Delivery

Step 1: Lead the Group Discussion — “The Art of Questioning”

Time: 5–7 minutes

Purpose: Build foundational awareness before workbook practice.

Lead a group discussion covering:

- Differences between **open-ended** and **closed-ended** questions
- When to use **probing questions**
- The importance of **clarifying vague answers**

- How questions help uncover deeper concerns and guide the customer

Discuss common pitfalls:

- Asking closed questions too early
- Overusing “Why?” (can feel accusatory)
- Skipping clarifiers and moving too quickly

Trainer Prompt: *“Think of a time someone asked you a poorly phrased question. What made it ineffective, and how could it be improved?”*

Step 2: Worksheet Activity — How Do I Improve My Questions?

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: Practice restructuring weak questions and building stronger alternatives.

Part 1: Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended

- Team members convert closed questions into open-ended prompts.
- Encourage responses beginning with:
 - ▶ *What...*
 - ▶ *How...*
 - ▶ *Tell me about...*

Part 2: Probing Questions — Digging Deeper

- Team members create clarifying questions that encourage the customer to expand.
- Reinforce probing stems such as:
 - ▶ *Can you tell me more about...*
 - ▶ *Where have you noticed...*
 - ▶ *What makes you say that...*

Part 3: Identifying Missed Opportunities

- Team members identify **where the Sales Inspector should have asked a better question** (instead of jumping to solutions).
- Discuss why their improved question would have kept the conversation going.

Trainer Action: Review several entries as a group to reinforce strong phrasing before moving into scenarios.

Step 3: Mini-Scenarios — Set #1

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: Practice turning weak questions into stronger ones out loud.

Instructions

1. Read the scenario setup and customer statement aloud.
2. Present the weak SI question.
3. Team member practices reframing it into a stronger question.
4. Discuss:
 - Does it open the conversation?
 - Does it encourage detail?

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- Is the tone helpful and non-confrontational?
5. Offer the improved example if needed.

Requirement: Each team member must complete **at least two scenarios** from this set.

Step 3: Mini-Scenarios — Set #2

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: Practice instinctive questioning and refinement.

Instructions

1. Read the scenario setup aloud.
2. Team member responds with their instinctive first question.
3. Evaluate together:
 - Did it encourage conversation or shut it down?
4. Coach them to improve the structure.
5. Provide the example fix if needed.

Requirement: Each team member must complete **at least two scenarios** from this set.

ACTIVITY: MINI-SCENARIOS

Purpose: Trainees will practice refining weak customer questions through real-time discussion and feedback. This exercise helps them recognize how small adjustments in phrasing and structure can lead to better customer engagement, uncovering concerns more effectively and guiding conversations toward solutions.

Trainer Instructions For: Mini-Scenarios Set #1

Trainer & Trainee Practice: Part 1 – 10 minutes

- Read the setup and customer statement aloud.
- Deliver the weak SI question and allow the trainee to respond.
- Have the trainee adjust and rephrase the weak question for better engagement.
- Discuss their response—was it open-ended, closed, or too leading?
- If needed, provide a strong example before moving on to the next scenario.

Mini-Scenario 1: A Customer Inquiry

- **The Setup:** *You're speaking with a homeowner who hasn't noticed any pest issues and doesn't see the need for service.*
- **Customer Comment:** *I haven't noticed any bugs, so I don't think I need pest control.*
- **Weak SI Question:** *Are you sure?* (Closed-ended, dismissive.)
- **Trainer Prompt:** *How can we reframe this to keep the conversation open?*
- **Example Fix:** *What types of pest issues have you had in the past?* (Encourages detailed response.)

Mini-Scenario 2: A Customer Concern

- **The Setup:** *This customer has tried another lawn service before but wasn't satisfied.*
- **Customer Comment:** *I've used another lawn company before, but I wasn't happy.*
- **Weak SI Question:** *Why didn't you like them?* (Can sound confrontational in the wrong tone of voice.)
- **Trainer Prompt:** *What's a way to show curiosity without sounding critical?*
- **Example Fix:** *What were you hoping to see from a lawn service that they didn't provide?* (Encourages the customer to share expectations.)

Mini-Scenario 3: A Customer Hesitation

- **The Setup:** *The customer is hesitant to commit to a full treatment plan.*
- **Customer Comment:** *I'm not sure I want to commit to a full treatment plan yet..*
- **Weak SI Question:** *Do you just want a one-time service then?* (Might push a decision too soon.)
- **Trainer Prompt:** *How can we guide the customer to explore options instead?*
- **Example Fix:** *What concerns do you have about starting a full plan?* (Opens conversation instead of forcing a choice.)

Trainer Instructions For: Mini-Scenarios Set #2

Trainer & Trainee Practice: Part 2 – 10 minutes

- Read the setup and customer statement aloud.
- Allow the trainee to respond naturally with their instinctive question.
- Evaluate their response—did it encourage conversation, or did it shut it down?
- Discuss adjustments—how could their question be improved?
- Provide an example fix if needed before moving to the next scenario.

Mini-Scenario 4: A Customer Inquiry

- **The Setup:** *You're speaking with a homeowner who wants a simple, low-cost option.*
- **Customer Comment:** *I just want a basic service, nothing fancy*
- **Trainee's Instinctive Response: ??? (Let the trainee respond.)**
 - ▶ **Trainer Evaluation:** *Does this response encourage more conversation or shut it down?*
- **Example Fix:** *What does 'basic service' mean to you? That way, I can make sure you get exactly what you need. (Clarifies expectations while keeping the conversation open.)*

Mini-Scenario 5: A Customer Concern

- **The Setup:** *The customer is worried about being locked into a long-term agreement.*
- **Customer Comment:** *I don't want to sign a contract—I don't like being locked into commitments.*
- **Trainee's Instinctive Response: ??? (Let the trainee respond.)**
 - ▶ **Trainer Evaluation:** *Does this response encourage more conversation or shut it down? How can you reassure the customer while still leading them toward a solution?*
- **Example Fix:** *I understand! Our goal isn't to lock you into something—it's to provide ongoing protection. Would it help if I explained how our service plan works? (Frames the response in a reassuring and informative way)*

Mini-Scenario 6: A Customer Skepticism

- **The Setup:** *The customer is questioning the pricing and comparing it to other options.*
- **Customer Comment:** *This seems too expensive compared to what I've seen elsewhere*
- **Trainee's Instinctive Response: ??? (Let the trainee respond.)**
 - ▶ **Trainer Evaluation:** *Does this response encourage more conversation or shut it down? How can you acknowledge their concern while reinforcing the value of our service?*
- **Example Fix:** *"I completely understand. Pricing is important, but it's also about what you're getting for that price. Would it help if I explained what sets Massey's service apart? (Acknowledges concern while keeping the conversation focused on value.)*

THE ART OF EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Asking the right questions is one of the most critical skills a Sales Inspector can develop. A **well-structured question can build trust, uncover hidden concerns, and guide customers toward a solution.** This explainer will help you teach trainees how to use **open-ended, probing, and impact questions effectively**, while avoiding common questioning mistakes—like making customers feel interrogated or forcing rushed answers.

This explainer is designed to help you with this task and follows three key principles:

1. **Open-ended questions uncover details and create engagement.**
2. **Probing questions dig deeper into specific concerns.**
3. **Impact questions highlight urgency and reinforce the value of Massey's services.**

Effective questioning starts with knowing when to use open-ended vs. closed questions.

Closed Questions

- **Definition:** Lead to short, specific answers (yes/no, a number, or a fact).
- **Purpose:** Use when verifying facts, confirming details, or narrowing down choices.
- **Examples:**
 - ▶ *Have you ever had a termite inspection before? (Yes/No)*
 - ▶ *When was the last time you had your lawn treated? (Date/Time)*
- **Watch Out:** Too many closed questions in a row can feel like a checklist or an interview, which may cause the customer to disengage.

Open-Ended Questions

Definition: Invite discussion and detailed responses.

Purpose: Use to gather information, understand concerns, and build trust.

Examples:

- *What concerns do you have about your home's pest protection? (Encourages details.)*
- *Tell me more about what you've noticed in your lawn recently. (Opens dialogue.)*
- **Watch Out:** Open-ended questions can lead to long or off-topic responses if not guided well. Be ready to steer the conversation back with a focused follow-up or summary.

Best Practices

- ✓ Start with **What, How, or Tell me about...** instead of "Do you" or "Is there."
- ✓ Use **open-ended questions first** to gather information, then **closed questions to confirm details.**
- ✓ Avoid **rapid-fire closed questions**—this can feel like an interrogation.

Probing Questions: Digging Deeper

Once a customer provides an initial response, probing questions help gather more details and clarify their true concerns.

- **Definition:** Encourage the customer to expand on their initial response.
- **Purpose:** Use when clarifying vague statements or identifying root concerns.
- **Examples:**
 - ▶ *You mentioned seeing pests in your kitchen. Can you tell me when you started noticing them? (Clarifies timeline)*
 - ▶ *What do you mean when you say your lawn isn't as healthy as it used to be? (Encourages detail.)*

✂ Customers don't always express their real concerns at first. A probing question lets them elaborate naturally instead of feeling pressured.

Impact Questions: Creating Urgency & Value

Impact questions help customers understand why taking action now is important.

- **Definition:** Highlight the consequences of inaction or the benefits of a solution.
- **Purpose:** Use when motivating the customer to see the importance of Massey's services.
- **Examples:**
 - ▶ *If left untreated, termites can cause serious structural damage. How would that impact your home's value? (Creates urgency.)*
 - ▶ *How important is long-term pest prevention for your family's health and comfort? (Reinforces value.)*

✂ Avoid fear-based selling! Instead of scaring the customer into a sale, use impact questions to help them see the real-life benefits of acting now.

What NOT to Do: The 'Why Question' Problem

✂ Avoid starting too many questions with 'Why.'

- **Why Questions** can feel confrontational or put customers on the defensive, like they have to justify themselves.
- Instead, rephrase as '**What**' or '**How**' questions to make the conversation more open.

Example Fixes: Poor → Better

- *Why haven't you scheduled pest control before?* → *What concerns have kept you from scheduling pest control in the past?*
- *Why do you want a lawn service now?* → *How do you see a lawn service helping your property long-term?*

Overview

Great questioning is about curiosity, not interrogation.

- ✓ Use **open-ended** questions to gather insight.
- ✓ Use **probing** questions to dig deeper.
- ✓ Use **impact** questions to create urgency.
- ✓ Avoid too many '**Why**' questions—opt for '**What**' and '**How**' instead.

WORKSHEET: HOW DO I IMPROVE MY QUESTIONS?

Part 1: Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended Questions

Instructions: Read each customer statement below. Then, rewrite the Sales Inspector's response to convert a closed-ended question into an open-ended one.

Example

Customer Statement: "I'm worried about termites."

Closed Question: "Have you seen any termite damage?" (Closed, limits conversation)

Open Question/Prompt: "What's making you concerned about termites?" (Encourages a more detailed response)

Your Turn

- Customer Statement:** "I've used another company before, and they didn't do much."
Closed Question: "So, they didn't resolve your pest problem?"
Open Question/Prompt:

- Customer Statement:** "We've been hearing strange noises in the attic, and in the wall."
Closed Question: "Was it a scratching sound?"
Open Question/Prompt:

- Customer Statement:** "My lawn was doing great, and now it's half dead!"
Closed Question: "Have you been watering it?"
Open Question/Prompt:

WORKSHEET: HOW DO I IMPROVE MY QUESTIONS?

Part 2: Probing Questions – Digging Deeper

Instructions: Below are initial customer responses. Write a probing question that encourages the customer to share more details.

Example

Customer Statement: “We used to have termites, but we haven’t seen them in a while.”

Probing Question: “Could you tell me more about where you saw the termites before and what kind of treatment you had?”

Your Turn

1. **Customer Statement:** “I see ants in my kitchen sometimes, but it’s not a big deal.”

Probing Question:

2. **Customer Statement:** “We spend a lot of time in our backyard, but the mosquitoes are terrible.”

Probing Question:

3. **Customer Statement:** “We spend a lot of time in our backyard, but the mosquitoes are terrible.”

Probing Question:

