



[Andrew Sobel](#)'s 2012 book describes how to grow relationships and build business by asking better questions.

Sobel believes that all relationships are based on having things in common and trusting each other. He writes that “In the business world, (relationships) are based on you having an understanding of the other person’s goals and therefore, an idea about how you can help them.” The easiest way to get this information is to ask the right questions.

In my full interview with Sobel, we discussed 10 powerful questions you should be asking your customers or clients:

- 1. What are your strategies (or plans) right now?** Knowing this will help build a credible relationship and offer the right services and solutions for your customer. It is also advantageous for you to share successful strategies that other customers have used.
- 2. As you look ahead to the next year in your business, what are you personally most excited about?** Sobel says people “light up” when asked this question because they get excited about what the future can hold.
- 3. Who will make the final decision about the firm you choose to work with?** This is critical because you need to know whether the person you are meeting with is the decision-maker. Cutting down on wasteful meetings will boost productivity and eventually sales.
- 4. What would you say is one of the top three priorities you are grappling with right now in your company?** Find out what your potential customer has tried and what initiatives they already have in place.
- 5. What is the single most important action that will make this business even more successful?** This is a good question to ask both of your customers and employees (people on the front line will have a very different—and valuable—perspective).

6. What would you like to cover in our discussion? This question focuses the meeting after you do the initial rapport-building so a lot can be accomplished in a short period of time (and not get sidetracked).

7. What decisions do we need to make today? This will guide every meeting to ensure it meets its intended outcome.

8. Is this the best we can do? Andrew believes this really pushes people. He tells the story of Winston Lord, an aide to Henry Kissinger who submitted a report on which Kissinger immediately wrote “Is this the best you can do?” After resubmitting the report a few times and having it returned by Kissinger with the same comment, Lord finally said, exasperated, “Yes, this is absolutely the best I can do.” Kissinger then looked up and said, ‘Now, I’ll read it.’ Sobel suggests, however, to use this tactic sparingly, since it can aggravate customers and employees.

9. Can you tell me more about this situation? Andrew explains that this is typically the opposite of what most people want to say in a crisis situation. They want to lead with “You know, let me kind of explain to you what’s really been going on here because you’re not fully informed.” When people are upset, emotions become facts. Sobel suggests that a better question could be “What would you like to see done at this point in time?” rather than imposing a framework that may not be successful.

10. What do you think? For Sobel, these are the four most important words to use in every conversation. Prospects and customers almost never get asked this question. Sobel believes that great leaders lead with questions.

*Author Bio: Andrew Sobel (www.andrewsobel.com) helps companies and individuals build clients for life. He is the most widely published author in the world on the topic of business relationships, and his bestselling books include *Power Questions*, *All for One*, *Making Rain*, and *Clients for life*. *All for One* was recently voted one of the top 10 sales and marketing books of the decade by a major marketing publication. His clients include many of the world's leading companies such as Citigroup, Hess, Cognizant, Ernst & Young, Booz Allen Hamilton, Deloitte, Experian, Lloyds Banking Group, and many others. Andrew's articles and work have appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *strategy+business*, and the *Harvard Business Review*. He spent 15 years at Gemini Consulting where he was a Senior Vice President and country Chief Executive Officer, and for the last 15 years he has led his own consulting firm, Andrew Sobel Advisors. Andrew has been married for 30 years and has three children. He can be reached at www.andrewsobel.com.*

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From your CWM Executive group:

- When asking questions about why something was done a certain way or why the client is questioning you, it is very important to first provide context to the client that you want to probe on why, to hopefully avoid seeming arrogant.

- Possible Q’s:
 - I want to make sure I understand what you’re saying....

- I'd like to better understand what thinking led up to your question...
Can you give me a few more details or other examples
- Never/or only very, very carefully ask: "How do you think your manager, or other leaders in your organization, would answer that question?"