



Socratic exercise – Two-minute drill with another person.

Instructions:

1. Write something on a piece of paper. Don't let anyone see it. It can be anything or subject, a news article, sports story, song, random thought, etc. It doesn't matter.
2. Select someone from your audience who is willing to be in front of the group.
3. Explain that they have two minutes to ask you any question that might get you to reveal what you wrote on the piece of paper. You will answer truthfully.
4. However, there is one question they can't ask you. They CANNOT ask, "What did you write on the paper?"
5. Use a timer set to 2 minutes. Start when they are ready.

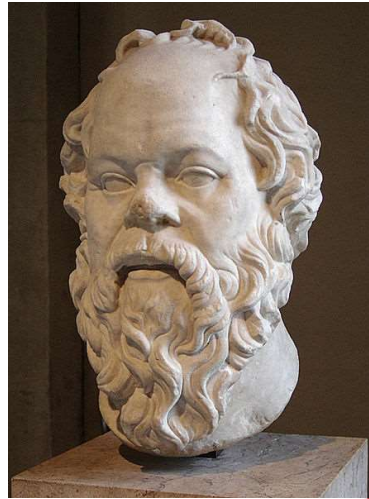
Generally the participant will ask closed-ended questions. i.e.

- Yes or No questions, etc.
  - Is it a color?
  - Is it animal, or person, etc.
5. As an option, if the individual fails to guess what you wrote, ask other members of the audience to help them. Let the exercise go on for another 2 minutes.

If someone stumbles across a Socratic style question (unlikely), ask the audience what that person did differently, and why it worked. Then proceed with this material.

## Socrates (470 – 399BC)

“I can not teach  
a man anything.  
I can only ask  
him questions  
and make him  
think.”

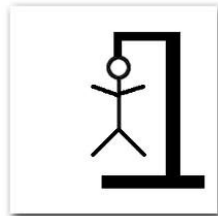


According to the Website [changingminds.org](http://changingminds.org), the Greek philosopher and educator Socrates believed that the most effective way to learn a topic and logically explore the validity of ideas was through asking a series of thought-provoking questions geared toward drawing out answers.

The overall purpose is to challenge accuracy and completeness of thinking in a way that moves people towards their ultimate goal.

## Statements vs Questions

- **We impose our own limits**
- **We don't actively *listen***
- **We lead the prospect**



VS



When we ask questions, we often don't learn what we want to learn. That's because we limit ourselves to what's in our own head (head trash). Unwittingly, we project our limits on the prospect.

In a selling situation, your prospect will often follow your lead (i.e., if you act like something is a big deal, then it becomes a big deal to them). Otherwise, they will answer the question, especially if it feels like they're in a conversation.

The reason we get stuck is that we're not actively listening. We focus so much on what is in our head (e.g., trying to think of our next question, feeling the pressure of the clock ticking, etc.) that we fall into the trap of asking "yes or no" questions. The conversation can start to resemble a game of "hangman".

In hangman, you aren't really asking questions, you're making statements that are merely framed as questions.

## Statements

- **Statements cause the mind to make a judgment (accept or reject) and then move on. Issue closed**
- **The human bias is negative**
- **Result: the more you “pitch”, the more negative they become**



When we want to influence someone, it is natural that our first inclination is to tell someone what we think.

However, when someone hears a statement, their mind involuntarily responds with judgements: Is this true, or not? Is this good for me, or bad?

If you don't know what the other person thinks, making statements hinders your ability to get the information you need.

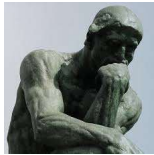
That's because your statements don't reflect any understanding of what the prospect thinks. This is often quite noticeable to your prospect.

Making statements without knowing how the other person thinks is like playing Russian Roulette: Sooner or later you are going to shoot yourself.

This is especially true in selling situations.

## Questions

**Questions engage the prospect and keep them involved**



**Intellectual** questions evoke intellectual answers



**Emotional** questions evoke emotional responses



Questions are better.

However, not just any kind of question will do. We've already seen how futile yes or no questions can be if you don't know what you are doing.

A much better kind of question is an open-ended question. Open-ended questions requires you to think a bit harder before you can ask them. In fact it is often useful to make a list of the most important open ended questions you would like to ask in advance of meeting with someone important.

Open ended questions can serve many purposes. For example:

- Intellectual questions invoke intellectual answers. (e.g., What theory of cost accounting does your accounting department prefer?)
- Emotional questions evoke emotional responses. (e.g., how bad was it for the production manager have to lay off so many of his people?)

But Socrates was expert at a special form of open-ended question.

## Socratic Questions

### 1. Open Ended

- What, Where, Why, When, How, Who

### 2. Relevant

### 3. Make them think

- Build creditability & trust



Not all open-ended questions are useful.

- For example, “What do you think?” is too open ended. Too broad, and thus ineffective.

Instead the most effective questions, called *Socratic* questions have several characteristics.

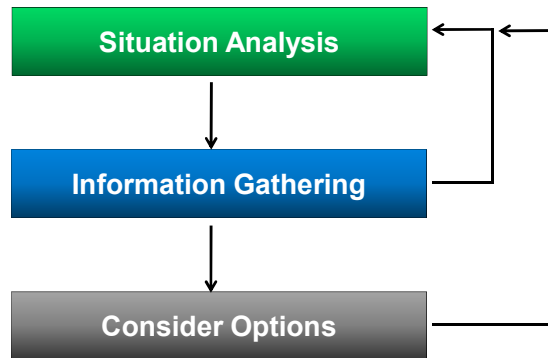
- They are open ended (of course)
- They are relevant to the prospect’s context, and to the topic at hand.
- They make the prospect think.

Socratic questions not only avoid clichés and one word answers, they get the other person to think. This can happen when you ask a question that is based on things they said, but in a way they might not have considered before. These kinds of questions show respect for what the other person thinks.

A Socratic question helps people think a little farther than before. That is why it earns their credibility and builds trust.

And of course, if the person has motives that differ from yours, it is something you need to know as early in the relationship as possible.

# Discovery Conversation



To learn more about Socratic questioning or how the Buying Decision Model makes B2B sales professionals more productive and happier in their jobs, please contact us:

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Socratic questioning starts the critical thinking process (cognition) relative to the problem they are trying to solve. The prospect's answers to the questions you ask provides you with valuable information.

And, neither their answers, nor your role in the conversation that follows should include offering a solution. Your open-ended questions should help the prospect to discover the solution (what they really want) themselves.

As a sales professional, you will need to ask open-ended, Socratic questions at every stage of your discovery. And as a friend, a spouse, or a parent, you will find this skill invaluable for understanding and influencing other people.

At Samurai Business Group, we use a model called the "Buying Decision Model" (BDM) to structure the kinds of questions that make sales conversations productive for both sellers and buyers. This material is a tiny part of our offerings. To learn more about Socratic questioning or how the Buying Decision Model makes B2B sales professionals more productive and happier in their jobs, please contact us:

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