



Rainmaking:
Questions that aid Business
Development for
Consultants and Services
Delivery teams



Just as the Kestrel **hovers** in the air above it's selected prey, looking how best to capture it's lunch, a Rainmaker **hovers** around a specific opportunity by asking searching and pertinent questions.

The questions both establish the Rainmaker's credibility in the eyes of the prospect but also make the prospect think around the opportunity.

The Rainmaker hopes that by hovering for a brief period they may discover more and larger projects to discuss later and that the specific project itself is better defined and in the right client context.

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Soften the Impact

The Questions that you will see below have been stripped to their bare minimum to keep them brief. Let me share with you a few techniques that will soften the blows:

The questions you ask during your business development meetings should never sound like the interrogation of a suspect by a policeman. Instead, they should be preceded by phrases such as:

Explain for me if you will...
Let me ask you this if I might...
Could you help me with...
Could you expand on that for me...
I'm interested in learning about...

Phrases such as these will enable you to soften your approach to questions, gather your thoughts and empower you to ask questions that are thoughtful and appropriate.

Try to ask questions that get the prospect reflecting and discussing issues, problems, challenges, opportunities, time frames, intentions, goals, impediments and desires. Do your best to ask questions that contain the classic "who, what, when, where and how."

Ask for permission to record your prospect's answers. Wait and record what you hear. Make it obvious you are interested and **captivated**... that you are prepared to maintain a permanent record of the things you have uncovered.

Ask questions that reflect your understanding of what your prospect has said.

Do that by making the following types of statements and end the statement with a rhetorical question like, "Is that correct?"

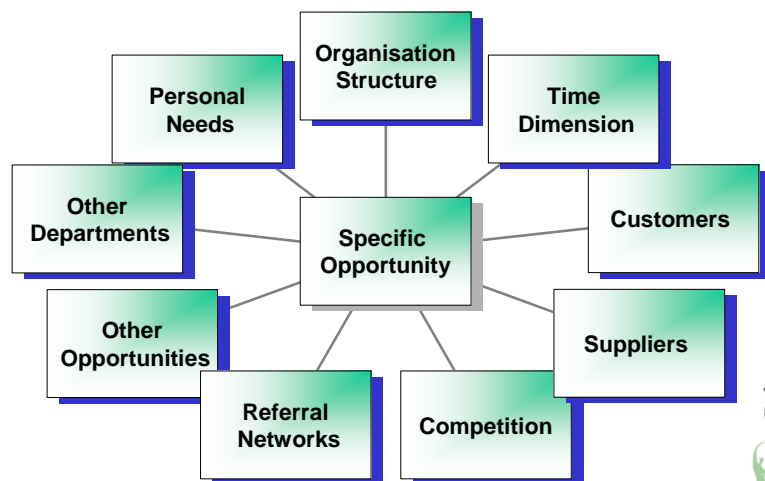
What I heard you say was...
My impression of your problem is...
If I heard you correctly ... Then go on to summarise in the prospects own words your understanding of what they said...

You can never ask enough questions. The secret is to ask the **right** questions of the **right** people at the right time.
Be sure you're with a qualified prospect by asking the **right** questions.
Work hard at developing your battery of questions.

My suggestion is that you try very hard to get the answers to your questions by conducting your own investigations into the company via the Internet or company annual reports and chairmen's statements prior to going in to see the client but always check your data with the client ! Mentioning the data that you find will build rapport, show you care and that you have prepared.

The Questions that help you develop more business

Opportunity MAP The 10 Aspects of Questioning



Opportunities have a number of dimensions that you should explore with your prospect or client.

1. The first dimension is the **Specific opportunity** that you have either uncovered or that your client has called you in to discuss.

2. The dimension of **Time** where you explore what your client has done in the past about their issue and what events will happen or are expected to happen in the future which may well effect or be effected by this issue.

3. **Customers** dimension leads you on to what impact solving the issue for your client may have on their clients and may well lead you to opportunities in their customer base.

4. **Suppliers** helps you understand any implications or influences on your project that happen by the way they are supplied and by whom. You can also explore here any important aspects of incumbent suppliers.

5. **Competition** is the dimension to explore your client's competitive position in their marketplace and any impact your project may have on that position and their ability to compete in it.

6. **Referral Networks** allows you to explore with satisfied clients how they may be able to make introduction to other prospects

7. **Other opportunities** dimension is for you to explore with the client other opportunities for other of your services

8. **Other Departments** may well allow you to develop business for the same services in similar departments

9. **Organisation Structure** allows you understand more about why they are organised in their particular way.

10. **Personal Needs** is where you will develop more of an understanding about your key contacts personal wins from a success.

1. Specific opportunity dimension questions

How important is the issue to the company?

- **If your CEO were here.. how important would they say that solving these issues would be?**
- **What's important to your CEO / Boss right now?**
- **Would she be interested in the solutions?**
- **Would she be available to get her view of the issues and potential solutions?**
- **What would convince your boss that this project had been a success?**
- **What will happen if you do not do this project in the next six months?**
- **On a scale of 1 to 10 how important is it to you to improve performance in this area?**
- **Where does this issue sit in the overall company's processes?**
- **What other projects will this one be competing against?**
- **Which of these is highest priority?**
- **Given limited budgets which projects will get the go-ahead first?**
- **How does what we are trying to do here link with the objectives of the CEO?**
- **What objectives do you have for wanting a solution to your problem?**
- **Is there a return on investment you are looking for?**
- **How much benefit would implementing our solutions deliver to your business.**
- **How much is it costing you NOT to implement our solutions.**
- **What are the other issues that you are dealing with?**

What does your client think is the requirement?

- **What other tactics have you used to solve the issues?**
- **What prompted you/ your company to look into this?**
- **What are your expectations/ requirements for this service?**
- **What process did you go through to determine your needs?**
- **Tell me about your needs that you think we may be able to assist with?**
- **How would you like us to approach the problem?**
- **What elements would you like to see in our solution?**
- **What do you see as the next action steps?**

What criteria will the client use to evaluate the different solutions proposed?

- **What criteria will you be using to decide which solutions you go for?**
- **What are your criteria in terms of price, outcomes, professionalism, timescales, return on investment?**
- **What criteria would you and your decision making team use to choose one vendor over another?**
- **If one supplier is more expensive than the others but demonstrates they are better will they get the business?**
- **Do you feel our solution has any unique facets to it?**
- **How valuable are they to you?**
- **What is your personal win if this project is successful?**

Who are you competing against?

- **Who will you be looking at to propose solutions to your issues?**
- **What experience have you had in dealing with each supplier?**
- **Do you have a favourite or favoured supplier?**
- **Is there a reason they are your favourite?**
- **How would you position each of your suppliers in terms of capability, credibility and style?**

What is the buying process, budget and decision making process for solutions to this problem?

- **What is your buying process for these services?**
- **How much are you prepared to spend to get improvements?**
- **Do you already have an approved budget for this effort?**
- **Apart from you who else would be involved in this decision?**
- **How will your decision team get together and decide that this is a problem you want to fix?**
- **What could make this no longer a priority?**
- **Since you haven't budgeted for this how are you going to manage the financial piece of this?**

What about the current set of suppliers for this service?

- **What is the nature of the working relationship you wish to develop with your suppliers?**
- **On what basis do you evaluate the effectiveness of your suppliers?**
- **Who has solved these kinds of issues for you before?**
- **What has been your view of their performance?**
- **What aspects were well done?**
- **Which were not so good?**
- **Any reasons?**
- **What has stopped you from changing your supplier up until now?**
- **What has stopped you from seeking our sort of services until now?**
- **What is stopping you from doing these things yourself?**
- **What would you be getting differently if you went to an outside vendor?**
- **Obviously if you are going to make a change then you would need to get agreement from your decision team to support the effort...**
- **What would they need to see to recognize that the change would not result in chaos?**
- **How will the teams involved get together to ensure a successful implementation?**
- **How will you handle the existing relationships with other suppliers?**
- **How do you plan to integrate the vendor that you choose with the way that you normally work?**
- **Who may be involved from your side?**
- **What is going to stop you calling in your current suppliers to do this task for you?**

What timescales does the client have in mind?

- **What is your timescale for implementing/ purchasing this type of service/ product?**
- **What is the reason for that?**
- **By when will you be looking for improvements in this area?**

How does this effect your key contact?

- **How are YOU specifically measured?**
- **How may this project affect that measurement?**
- **Are there specific incentives for performance improvements?**

Any other aspects we should both know about?

- **What other data points should we know before moving forward?**
- **What are your thoughts?**
- **What's changed since we last talked?**
- **What concerns do you have?**
- **What's working really well right now about how you are doing things?**
- **What is not going as well as you would like or you think it could be better?**
- **How do you plan to find out what might work better for you?**
- **How have you managed to continue on so successfully?**
- **I have heard you say that you need XXX from me to continue your investigation. I can call, email, come back, do a conference call with a few of you... Tell me how you would like to proceed?**

2. Time dimension questions

- **Do you have an overall mission statement for your business?
If Yes what is it?**
- **What is the vision for the company over the next 3 to 5 years?**
- **What changes will that mean you need to make?**
- **What business objectives did you pursue last year?**
- **What do you consider to have been your major successes last year?
..... and disappointments?**
- **Which of those objectives were achieved?**
- **What were the main factors that accounted for you not achieving a number of your objectives?**
- **What were the most important lessons you believe your company learned last year?**
- **With the benefit of hindsight what changes would you have made to last year's activities?**
- **What do you consider to be the most important issues facing your Company today?**

3. Customers dimension questions

- **What needs do you satisfy for your clients?**
- **What are the top 3 issues you deal with for your customers?**
- **How do you do that?**
- **Do you run an annual customer satisfaction survey?**
 - **What are the top issues in it?**
 - **How do you plan to respond to those client needs?**
- **How are your customers needs changing?**
- **What were their needs 5 years ago? What are they now? What will they be in the future?**

4. Suppliers dimensions questions

- **As a company who are the current main suppliers to you?**
- **What are the products and services that they supply to you? What is involved in making that happen?**
- **What is the process of adding your value to theirs?**
- **Where do you get your people from? (If it's a services business) Where do they live? How far away?**
- **Do you run an annual employee or supplier satisfaction survey?**
 - **What are the top issues in it? How do you plan to respond to those issues? Who owns the plan to respond to those issues?**

5. Your client's competition dimension questions

- How is your business performing when compared with your direct competitors?
- On what basis are you measuring your company's performance this year?
- What changes will you be making this year in order to strengthen your market position?
- What are your major financial objectives for this year?
- What image does your company want to convey to its customers?
- Who do you consider to be your most important competitors?
- What do you admire most about these companies?
- How are you seeking to offset their influence on your business?

6. Referral network questions

- Are there other people that you know in other companies that may benefit from receiving the kinds of services that we've delivered to you?
- Are you part of a business network of any kind?
 - How does that work?
 - Is there anyone who you could refer me to on that network
 - I'm specifically looking for FD's HR directors etc
- Who do you know on your personal network who you could call and recommend me and my company ?

7. Other opportunities questions

- **Some of our clients are experiencing these difficulties.... Is this something you are facing or will face?**
- **For some of our clients in your industry we are finding that they are looking at these issues.... Is this something you are doing?**
- **We are finding that some of our more forward looking clients are asking us to look into these issues for them? Is this something that you may require?**
- **Clients who only used to purchase these services from us are now asking us to deliver these services too... Would that be something you would like to discuss?**
- **Who else in your organisation may be interested in a conversation with us?**
- **Are there other parts of your organisation that you would recommend I go and visit to talk about opportunities for us? Could you make a few introductions for me?**

8. Other departments questions

- **What other departments are there who may have similar needs to yours?**
- **Would a decision for you impact them in any way?**
- **Would they be involved in the decision**
- **How would a decision be made?**
- **Who might be involved in the decision besides you and your team?**
- **How complicated or simple is the process of decision making in your company?**

9. Organisation structure dimension questions

- **What is the organisation structure of the overall company including HQ and any subsidiaries?**
- **What reasons mean that you are structured how you have just described?**
- **How large are each of the subsidiaries, business units or divisions?**
- **Which of these are most profitable?**
- **Which of these is growing most quickly?**
- **Which of these is seen as the future and which the past?**
- **What are the top 3 reasons for why one group is more profitable than another?**

10. Personal and personnel needs questions

- **Have you dealt with these kinds of issues before?**
- **Could you tell me about your background?**
- **Have you worked for other companies?
Who and for how long? Doing what?
and departments in this company? For how long?**
- **What experience have you had at dealing with these kinds of issues?**
- **Was the experience positive or negative? Why?**
- **Would meeting some similar people in our other clients help you?**

- **What is the typical background of people working in this part of the organisation?**
- **What are their needs with regards to our kinds of services?**
- **Do you conduct an annual employee satisfaction survey?**
 - **If Yes what were the top 3 issues?**
 - **What plans are in place to solve the issues?**
- **What kinds of people are you employing now?**
 - **How will be that be changing in the future?**
 - **How will that affect your business?**
- **What qualifications and experience do the people in your team typically have?**
- **How did you get involved in... ?**
- **What kind of challenges are you and your team facing?**
- **What's the most important priority for you with this? Why is that?**
- **What other issues are important to you?**
- **What would you like to see improved?**
- **How do you measure that?**
- **What do people in your team do to socialise?**
- **What do you do to relax?**
- **Hobbies?**
- **Got kids? Husband? Partner? Etc.... Name of dog... ;-)**



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