

*The 12 Best Questions
to Ask Prospects
and Customers*

**An Interview With Jim Meisenheimer,
by Art Sobczak**

**TelesalesSuccess.com Inner Circle
Platinum Managers Members**

12 Best Questions to Ask Prospects and Customers

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This is a transcript of the Telesales Success Inner Circle Platinum Managers Members audio seminar **“12 Best Questions to Ask Prospects and Customers”** An Interview with Jim Meisenheimer, by Art Sobczak.

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Art: Hello and welcome to the Telesales Success Platinum Audio Seminar. I'm Art Sobczak. On this program I'm thrilled to be speaking with Jim Meisenheimer who's going to tell us the 12 Best Questions to Ask Customers.

Jim is a sales strategist. He shows sales people and entrepreneurs how to increase sales, earn more money, have more fun and how to do it all in less time. Got my attention Jim.

His focus is on knockout selling skills that get immediate results. He's authored seven books including the recently published "57 Ways to Take Control of Your Time and Your Life." He's also the publisher of "The Knockout Sales Tips Letter" and for the past couple of years Jim has had a regular column in our "Telephone Prospecting and Selling Report Newsletter." He's been in business for 18-1/2 years. He has 502 corporate customers, and that's growing, and out of that 83.3% is repeat business.

Now on a personal note, I've known Jim for about 15-years now, and for the past 10 we've been members of a mastermind group that meets four times a year. So Jim and I have spent a lot of hours over the years kicking around ideas. And I can tell our listeners that Jim's material is right up there with any of the big name sales gurus in the business. Welcome Jim.

Jim: Art what a terrific introduction and it's great to be with you.

Art: Well super. Tell you what, why don't we just jump right into the material here because questions, of course, are the basis for professional selling. So tell us about the book. What motivated you to write this book?

Jim: Art you can probably tell from my accent I'm originally from New York and try to make a long story short. I used to do everything fast – eat fast, drive fast and talk fast. In my early sales career I really was convinced that my mouth was the center of my universe until I read a book, Spin Selling, published in 1988, and it changed my life. It taught me that the path to sales success is with questions, and I've learned to employ my ears before I engage my mouth. About 17-years ago I wrote an article called *The 12 Best Questions*. It was in a medical magazine, and from that article my interest intensified, and the reaction to it was positive. The book came as a result.

Art: So to back up again to the book you read, you said that it was Spin Selling correct?

Jim: Spin Selling by Neil Rackham. It's a classic book. Now it reads like a textbook. It's not easy to get through, but there's about two or three chapters in there that if you pay attention it can really change your life. It changed my life. I just don't talk as much and I find the less I talk the smarter I sound.

Art: I had a similar revelation, and that book should certainly be a part of anybody's sales library, along with yours.

Well why don't sales people ask better questions?

Jim: Art there's a couple of reasons. Number one they think they are already asking good questions. I'm convinced the sales people confuse being prepared with sounding canned. Sales people think if I sit down, put words on paper and I prepare some questions that I'm going to go in there and I'm going to sound canned, when in fact we all end up sounding alike when we don't prepare.

I'll give a real quick example. When you go to a department store in Seattle, San Diego, Florida or Maine, usually we're greeted by a sales clerk who says, "Can I help you?" They all do it intuitively, instinctively and yet they all say the same thing. Imagine making a sales call without preparation and beginning with, "I know you're busy, I won't take up too much of your time." We end up saying the same things. Sales people are reluctant to prepare questions in advance.

Art: I go into that quite often in seminars as well, and it seems to me what people fear the most is sounding silly, so therefore they don't prepare. But what happens is, because they don't prepare, they sound silly.

Jim: Exactly. They end up sounding silly. If I could just do a little side bar here. Like you I have written books and I have CDs, and like you, when I go to a seminar or do a corporate training program, I offer products for sale at a special price. In the middle of my presentation I'll ask people, "How important are questions in the sale process?" People say, "Oh it's vital. It's crucial." I go, "Which question is the better for getting more information, open or close?" They say, "Oh open questions to be sure." Then I'll ask them, "How important are using open questions in being an effective salesperson?" And the people say, "You have to be able to do it."

And I say, "Okay here's the deal. I've got \$1400 dollars worth of product here, and if anybody in the room, either standing up or sitting down, if you can give me your 10 best questions without having to think about them, open ended questions, and without saying 'awe' or 'um' once, I'll give you all our products." Now Art, over the years, how many products do you think I've given away?

Art: I bet you still have them.

Jim: I still do. And it's amazing. A quick analogy – if you ask an American to say the Pledge of Allegiance, "*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the...*" they know it like the back of their hand. They don't go, "I pledge allegiance, um, to the flag of the, uh..." and that's the difference. When you know something, you can say it confidently. I think most sales people are missing the boat on this, leaving a lot of money on the table.

Art: I agree with you. Well tell me, from your prospective, what do you feel are the major benefits of asking thought provoking questions?

Jim: Two key benefits come to mind. First, I think when you ask questions you're expressing and showing interest. Think about when any of us were dating. If you were interested in the other person, you showed that interest by asking questions. I think asking good questions shows interest and in doing that it builds rapport.

Now even more importantly, by asking good questions you can really uncover or discover maybe what's going on if you're prospecting your customer. Find out where his pain is. It's almost like putting a stethoscope on and your taking all the lab tests, your listening to the heartbeat, taking the pulse and you do all of that before you say, "Here's how I can help you." I think that the benefits are amazing, and you'll do less talking and more listening, and you'll learn much more about your customer.

Art: The medical analogy is certainly a great one. I use that example all the time. Doctors wouldn't think of giving you a prescription or setting you up for surgery by just saying, "Hmm looks like you have a headache. Let's go in for brain surgery."

Jim: Yeah. I was conducting a two day coaching program at the Young Salesman List and I said, "I want you to go to a pharmacy, and I want you to buy a stethoscope, and I just want you to leave it on the front seat of the car, and every time you make a sales call look at that." And think... I have to do an exam. I have to get to know this person before I can begin to tell them how I can solve their problems.

Art: That's great. Well people are probably setting on the edge of their seats saying, "Okay, well what are these 12 questions?" So let's get into them.

Jim: All right. Number One. What I'll do is I'll share the question and just give a little insight as to the reason for the question. The first question is "Tell me about your business." The word 'business' can be replaced with tell me about your 'project', tell me about your 'department' or tell me about your 'company'. Whatever works best. What you want to do is to preface the question with a statement that says, "I've done some research. I've been to your website. I've seen your company's name in an article." So let them know you've done some research and then say, "Well tell me about your business." And if the person says, "What would you like to know?" Just respond, "Whatever is important to you." And then you start listening.

Is he talking about the people in the business? Is he talking about the numbers, their performance? You'll get some insight into how the person is thinking.

Art: That's a great follow-up. "Whatever's important to you," I like that.

Jim: Yeah. And one other thing Art that your listeners might benefit from. Google has a service, it's News.Google.com, and when you go there you can put in the name of a person or the name of a company, and anytime anything appears on the internet with the name of the person or the name of the company you will get an e-mail with the link to that article. I mean it's just like a clipping service on steroids.

Art: That's the Google news alerts?

Jim: That's correct.

Art: So it's...

Jim: News.Google.com.

Art: That's right, and I certainly suggest for everybody listening that you have this set up for your five major accounts or your five major targeted accounts, so that you're always on top of whatever news is coming out about them.

Jim: Yeah and with the same top five accounts, with your key decision maker, put their name in. If the person takes over the United Way Campaign for his county you'd know it the next day.

Art: The little things that everybody doesn't do can make a huge difference.

Jim: Exactly, and that's what success is all about. It's doing the very things that other people aren't willing to do.

Art: Okay so number one again is "Tell me about your business." Number two?

Jim: Number Two. Four words, and it gets them talking – "What are your responsibilities?" Now I like brevity, but if you wanted to you could say, "What are your responsibilities at Xerox?" by inserting the name of the company. Okay, so you go from four words to six words. You can do that too.

People love to talk. Those of us in sales know we love to talk, but most people love to talk and when you ask the person, "What are your responsibilities?" Boy this is a chance for them to open up. Now there are four behavioral styles, and some people will talk in bullet points and some people will go on and on and on. But what you want to listen for are clues and signs to indicate the size of their ego.

With the first two questions you'll get some really good insight into what makes the person kick.

Art: And what you're doing here is something that a lot of sales people neglect. That is finding out about that person personally because some of those motivators may be stronger than even some of their business motivators.

Jim: Exactly. You're absolutely right.

Art: Great question.

Jim: You ready for three?

Art: Yep.

Jim: Okay. "In addition to you, who else is involved in making decisions for [and then you insert the product]?" I used to sell laboratory supplies. So I would say, "In addition to you, who else is involved in making decisions for lab supplies?" It could be medical supplies, dental supplies, building supplies, whatever product or service you're selling.

What makes this question rock solid is the fact that you're not saying, as so many sales people do, "Are you the decision-maker?" Because most people will say, "Well you bet." Then a few months down the road when you're trying to get the orders they say, "I have to take it upstairs to my boss. He makes the decisions." Well you asked the wrong question.

When you say, "In addition to you," your saying to the person, "Look I know you're involved, but in addition to you who else is involved?" And they're more likely to open up to you.

Art: It's an assumptive question as well, and you're right that it's a horrible question, "Are you a decision maker?" And a lot of people ask that in an opening statement, which I'll save for another session. But that's a horrible way to begin a call as well.

Jim: Well sure. Can you imagine asking somebody, "Are you the decision-maker?" And the person saying, "Oh gosh no, decisions aren't my department." But it doesn't happen that way.

Art: Plus you should already know that.

Jim: Exactly.

Art: Great. Okay.

Jim: Number Four. This might be the most important question, and it can, depending on what your selling, take on a life of its own. You want to find out what the problems are so you can use your product or service to solve the problem. But you don't want to use the word 'problem', especially when you're just beginning to build a relationship with this person.

But the question is, "What's the biggest challenge you face?" For example, if somebody calls me for sales training I would ask the vice president of sales or the president of the company, "What's the biggest challenge your sales people face in growing your business?" And then I listen. He's going to describe the problem. And then I might say, "What happens when that happens?" You might have to ask several follow-up questions, but you're trying to find out two things:

Number one – you want to get a description of the problem or their current situation. And then more importantly - and I'll tell you that most sales people just blow by this, and I'm amazed by the fact that they do - you want to quantify the problem in dollars. That is very important. Do we have time Art for me to illustrate that?

Art: Yeah, absolutely. This is so important. So were attaching a price tag to the problem.

Jim: Yeah. Now better than using widgets as an example, I just might use my own business. A VP of sales calls up and I ask him the first couple of questions. I'll come back to question number four and I'll ask them, "What are the biggest challenges your sales people face in growing?" It's prospecting.

I ask "How many sales people do you have?" He says, "I have 40 sales people." I follow up and ask, "How many of those sales people are doing it right?" He says, "10." So you have 30 sales people who are prospecting up to standard?" And he would say, "Sure." "Okay what would you like the 30 people to be doing that they're not doing on a weekly basis?" He says, "I want them to call on one more prospect." So now I got 30 prospects. Okay?

I'll then ask him, "What's your closing ratio your sales people see? What's your closing ratio?" Let's say he says, "The closing ratio is 25%." That's 7.5, okay?

Then I ask them, "What's an average sale?" He says, "\$10,000 dollars." So now we have \$10,000, times 7.5 is \$75,000 dollars. You take \$75,000 dollars times 50, that's \$3,750,000 dollars in a year. I'm going to multiply that times five. I want to make it very big. He's got an \$18,750,000 dollar problem if he doesn't change how his sales organization is prospecting.

Can you see how, can you hear how powerful that is?

Art: I hope you didn't cause that guy to jump off a bridge!

Jim: No, but here's what happened – they sometimes will respond by saying, "You know and I think that's conservative." Or they'll say, "I had no idea it was that big." But the reason why this is so significant is it creates a sense of urgency on solving the problem and it makes my speaking fee, the cost of the solution, minuscule by comparison. That's why it's so important to quantify the size of the problem. It makes selling your product or service as a solution so much easier.

Art: Well what you're doing is preempting the price objection.

Jim: Ever since I started doing this, preempting is a great word - it is preempting, I am prepared to deal with the price objection. Sometimes it's frustrating. I don't get it (the price objection) anymore.

Art: And what's interesting about what you said there - going back to what you said earlier - if you ask the question, "What problems are you facing now?" he may not have even said prospecting. because he might not have been viewing that right at that very moment as a problem.

Jim: Right, yeah.

Art: And the way you framed that question you got him talking about that. We've got time here, so let me just interject my own stories kind of similar to that. It was on an incoming call and the guy who called said, "Yeah I've got your brochure here for your Telesales College. I see you have that on CD. We're thinking about maybe getting your CDs." I said, "Oh, what caught your eye in the brochure?" He said, "Well I think we're leaving some money on the table." I said, "Well what do you mean by that?" He said, "Well I've got 10 sales people here and were in the supplies business and they call their regular accounts and they're just pretty much selling them what they normally buy." I said, "Well what should they be doing?" He said, "Well they should be asking questions and recommending other items."

I probably asked a series of five or six more questions based on his answers and bottom line I said to him, "So on average, per sales rep how much do you think they're leaving on the table?" He said, "They each probably could be doing conservatively another \$250,000 dollars in gross profit per rep." And I said, "Times 10 sales reps? All of them?" He said, "Yeah."

So now it became, similar to yours, a \$2.5 million dollars in profit situation. So then my next question was, "Well what do you think you should do?" He said, "Well I probably ought to send all 10 of the people to your seminar." I said, "Yeah you think? And get the CDs too right?"

Jim: See when you do it this way, and I know you agree with me, you really make it a no-brainer. It smoothes the way for making an intelligent and easy decision.

Art: And what you're doing too is really being conversational as opposed to thinking "I need to ask these 10 questions." You're just really listening to the answer.

Jim: That's a key and good point you just made. When you know the questions in advance, you can make them very conversational. I hope your listeners don't get the mindset that you're standing there with a clipboard and you're checking out. I've got seven more questions to ask you. It doesn't come across like that. It's very, very - and your using a keyword - it's very, very conversational.

Art: Absolutely.

Jim: It just flows.

Art: Okay.

Jim: Which leads into the next question. It's a short question. It can be expanded based on what you're selling. The question is, "What are your priorities?"

In my own business it could be, "What are your priorities for sales training?" if somebody hires me to kick off a national sales meeting. "What are your priorities for your national sales meeting?" If it's for a product line, "What are your priorities for dealing with the supplier?" "What are your priorities for the new building?" Then just sit back and let them tell you what the priorities are.

When they're all done it's like having a balloon, then letting all the air out of the balloon and at the very end you go whoosh. You get even more by simply asking, "Is there anything else? Are there any other priorities?" And just ask the question, "What are your priorities?"

Now some sales people will take this question and say, "What are your top three priorities?" Well you don't need the top three. Just ask him what his priorities are; maybe he'll give you seven. Then you ask him to shuffle the deck and reprioritize them for you. It's a powerful question.

Art: It is. I could see how that is very valuable.

Jim: Let me give you...how we doing on time? Are we doing okay?

Art: Oh yeah.

Jim: Let me give you an example; I was doing a sales management training program in Chicago a number of years ago, and we were talking about these questions and I said, "There's a lot of power in asking what are your priorities." Then a sales manager came up, and he was kind of like a doubting-Thomas, and he said, "Would this work on my boss?" I said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "Well I'm having dinner with him tonight and I think I know him pretty well." I said, "Ask him the question and you tell me tomorrow morning."

He comes in, he's the first one in 7:00 the next morning with a big grin on his face, he said, "You know I asked my boss, 'what are your priorities for the coming year' and he gave me his agenda. He gave me his hidden agenda. He gave me his double hidden agenda." He said, "I learned so much from my boss and I thought I knew what his priorities were. I had no clue." It's a great question and it can open up people.

Art: Isn't it amazing sometimes how salespeople will come up to you and say, "You know I tried that, it really works."

Jim: It really does. Along that same line I taught these questions to my kid, and my kid's the number one sales rep in the audio department at Best Buy. He sold \$18,000 dollars worth of stereos last week. That's kind of funny too. These questions work.

But anyway, question number six on the surface sounds really easy, and a lot of sales people think they're already asking the question, but if you change one word, you can change the question. That doesn't mean my question is necessarily better, but when you change the question your likely to get a different response.

The question is, "What qualities are you looking for in..." and then you have to insert, based on the product or service your selling. If I ask "What qualities are you looking for in a sales training program?" then just sit back and listen, the tendency is for people to give you generalities. For example, why ask a VP of sales, "What qualities are you looking for in a sales training program?" He might say, "I'm looking for substance. I'm looking for an energetic delivery here." I know what those words mean but I don't know what he means when he says that. So you always want to follow-up with something like, "Now how do you define an energetic presentation?" Or, "What does that mean when you say that?" Get their thoughts. That's the time you want to be taking really good notes.

Art: Let's just expand on that a little bit more, because that point so important. So again, when somebody gives you a definition, your definition is almost always going to be different than theirs.

Jim: Exactly.

Art: So the word 'substance'. So when you say you want substance in a program how would you define that? What does that look like?

Jim: Exactly, because if you don't...I don't know if you remember Art, but years ago there were some sales training programs that would encourage you to paraphrase what the person just said to you, and I remember being taught that and I remember doing it. But I tell you what, when you ask a thought provoking question and you get a response, why would you want to put it into your own words and say, "This is what I thought I heard you say."

Why not, especially when you ask this question you get their definition, and your going to get language that's spicy and crispy, and they're going to put words together and you want to just write that down because they're expressing it in a very unique way, and that's where you make the connection, especially later on when your putting together a sales proposal or your sales presentation.

Art: Exactly. So your writing down their words, which you will then use back to them later, and of course, then it's going to have a connection.

Jim: Sure, and when you have that connection, the person says, "That's exactly what I'm looking for. That's what I heard you say." That's the beauty of taking notes. And I will say this; I demonstrate this in my training programs. I'll ask people a very simple question and use my business as an example, or I'll use their business and I'll ask everybody to write down, give me at least seven words in a sentence form. "What qualities are you looking for ...(then insert something)?"

Then I'll call on three people and I'll write down what each one of them has said. Then I'll just wait a minute or two and go around the room and say, "Who remembers what Jackie said? Who can tell me word-for-word what Susan said?" They just heard it minutes ago, moments ago and guess what? It's gone. And if your coming back to make a sales call in two or three weeks, you just will not be as prepared as if you had taken some good notes, especially on some of the language -unique language - that they use on certain things.

Art: Let me just reiterate what you had just said there as far as the importance of listening. I know we both talk about this quite a bit, and I do a similar exercise and then talk about the most important thing about listening is having a purpose for doing it. Then I'll do the exercise again and I'll say, "Now everybody we're going to have a test on what these three people are going to say, so listen very carefully." And then you ask everybody afterwards and of course everybody gets it because now they know they're being tested.

So I tell them to get that same attitude in mind when you're listening on a sales or prospecting call. Listen as if you're being tested every time, because if you have a purpose you'll do it.

Jim: That's a great exercise. I may have to borrow that from you.

Art: Just give me credit.

Jim: Okay. But you know the thing about being tested is they really are, because if they're working within a competitive situation where they've got two or three other competitors they are being tested. And the person at the end who's got the highest grade gets the business. So it's a great mindset and a really good example that you gave.

Art: Okay, well let's move on to number seven.

Jim: All right, Number Seven - and this is a good question and a bad question. It's good because of what you learn and it's bad because of how it'll make you feel. Let me tell you what the question is, then I'll explain. The question is "What do you like most about the product that you're using? What do you like most about your current supplier? What do you like most about the service that you're currently getting?"

And it's an important question because it describes hot buttons. It's what they like the most, and sales people sometimes are reluctant to ask that question because they fear that maybe they and their company can't provide that, don't have that advantage or benefit or can't provide that service. But I'll tell you what, it really gets them talking. Now the part that's singing the praises of your competition...I want to give you an example.

I got a call a couple of years ago from an executive director of a trade association. We got into the questions and he was obviously thrilled with the person who they had last year. He did a three hour presentation. I asked, "What do you like most about this person?" He went onto tell me how this person walked. He just walked on air. He was just...everybody loved him. He got the highest ratings. And I'm sitting on the phone. I got my headset on. My eyes, I've got steam coming out of my ears and my eyes are rolling. And he went on and on, so much so that I almost, and I held back and I didn't, I almost said to him, "If you like him so much why don't you hire him?" But I didn't.

But I learned everything that he liked about him. And so that's important. We need to get to that and we need to have them describe that. And this leads into the next question.

Art: Actually let me back up.

Jim: Okay sure.

Art: After you asked everything that he liked what didn't he like?

Jim: Well that's the next question.

Art: Oh it is?

Jim: Yeah. That's the next question.

Art: I was wondering why he didn't hire the other guy.

Jim: Here's something that, I don't know Art, you probably experienced this as many times as I have, where salespeople will say - especially if your working a small group where you get 10 or 20, 30 sales people – someone will say, "Well I'm kind of new. I've been doing this three years, and my competition's been calling on my biggest prospect for 25-years." It terrifies them. It's like how do you break that down?

And the answer is you don't have to break it down - all right? But here's a simple truth. Nothing in life is perfect, nothing. As good as you think something or someone is, nothing is perfect. So it's on this simple premise, that simple truth that you want to go exploring. And you want to be very careful how you ask it. You don't want to say, "What don't you like? What do you dislike?" You want to use a positive word.

It's like the word challenge is a good substitute for the word problem. And the word change is a good substitute for finding out what somebody doesn't like. So you ask the question – "If you could change anything about let's say so and so what would it be?"

Now here's what you have to get ready for. You have to get ready for at least 50% of the people coming right back at you saying, "I can't think of anything." Then you pause a little bit, lean back in your chair and just ask the same question again, "If you can change anything, just any little thing about so and so, what would it be?"

Art: So you're repeating the question?

Jim: Absolutely.

Art: As if they never answered it.

Jim: You repeat the question, and you probably don't have to do it more than three times. But you'll get more and more people on that second attempt, when you re-ask the question, respond into it. But there will be some people - and

these are maybe the little analytical people - who have to go through the card deck in their heads and review everything. So what I would do to help that process is ask the person, "How long have you been doing business with this company?" And let's say he says, "It was January '99."

So then you ask the question again, and you take your thumb and your index finger, just take a little thing and say, "Look if you could change [and hold it up] any little thing about this company from the time that they started January '99 right up and through and including yesterday, what would it be?" Now what you've done is your forcing the person to take a virtual tour, think about all the way back to January 1999. You have to be patient. It takes them a couple of minutes. They will always come up with something. They will always come up with something once you frame it like that.

Art: Yeah what you're doing is starting out with a very big, broad general question. And quite often, if somebody hadn't thought about this before, they're going to give you the answer, "I can't think of anything." But then if you ask it again now of course you're giving them more time to do it, and then what you've done is again you've gotten more specific and put it in visual terms in their mind. Keeping in mind that almost everybody listening to this will be doing this over the phone, and now you're causing them to search in a smaller perimeters which should yield an answer, and obviously does from your experience. I like that.

Jim: Yeah and it works. It works. It's amazing to watch this. Like you, I don't do large groups. I think the largest group I've ever spoken to is about 800 people, but that's rare for me. But if I have a group of a hundred or 200 people I sometimes will demonstrate this and ask anybody, "Have any of you [as a small group] been out to a good restaurant? I mean a really good restaurant. One that you wouldn't hesitate to recommend to anybody on the planet." And the hands start going up. So I call up three people who went out to the same restaurant. I bring them up to the front of the room and I'll ask them the question, "If you could change anything about last night what would it be?"

One guy folds his arms and looks at me and says, "I can't think of a single thing. It was excellent." I said, "You just think about it." Then I went onto to number two and number three and somebody says, "Well the salad could've been a little bigger." The third person says, "The bread could've been a little warmer." I put them back in their chairs and I have them look at the salad...any little thing at all and he says, "Jim I'm telling you it was phenomenal." I said, "What time did you get there?" He said, "We got there about 7:00." "What time did you leave?" He said, "About 11:00."

"From the time that you got there at 7:00 until the time that you left at 11:00, any one little thing that you could change, what would it be?" Then all of a sudden it's like a gushing fire hydrant. He says, "We had to wait for that table, and it took us 20-minutes to get the check, and now that I think about it, the washroom wasn't

so clean." And then he goes on and on and on and on. It's amazing. Sometimes it takes a little extra effort to pull it out, but once again the simple truth is nothing in life is perfect.

Art: That's a great process. Although you did ruin their perception of their dinner.

Jim: I know it. I didn't mention any restaurant name.

Art: That's fabulous. Good stuff.

Jim: All right, lets go to the next question. And I just want to remind your listeners, well maybe not remind, but ask them a question: If you take a sales call, the very first time that your meeting with the prospective client, either over the phone or talking over the phone and meeting with them face-to-face, and depending on how much time you get, maybe 30-minutes, maybe an hour. Let's just say for the purposes of this interview it's 40-minutes.

Then I'm going to take each 10-minutes and say there's a quadrant. In the first quadrant is the first 10-minutes and the second quadrant and so forth, and I ask your listeners to think about how they would respond to this question; "In which quadrant do you currently get the price objection?" When I've asked that question to thousands of people, many of them say, "I get it right up front, right up front."

Now you will never get the price objection up front when you ask these questions. Now up to this point we could be 30-minutes or 40-minutes into this call. We could be 40-minutes into a conversation over the phone, 40-minutes face-to-face and I haven't begun to talk about what I can do. There is no price objection. That usually comes up after you start talking about a product or a service. So that's another benefit, I believe, in asking these questions.

Art: Oh I agree. We could probably do another session just on price objections. I believe salespeople create more price objections than were ever there to begin with.

Jim: Well maybe we can repeat this on that call with the price objection. I think that's a really unique sales tip, and that is assuming you ask all your questions, you're giving a presentation and then somebody asks you, "Okay how much is this going to cost?" Instead of giving them the unit's price or the price of the service you look at them and say, "It depends." Now when you say, "It depends," you can anticipate what they're going to say. They're going to say, "It depends on what?" And then depending on what you're selling you could say, "It depends on the size of the order. It depends on what else you can add to the order. It depends on the length of the contract."

What you're doing, is your setting in motion something that says, "You're a player." And they can't just have their way with you. What you're also saying is, "I can wiggle on the price if you can wiggle on the order." So it depends, and when you deal with someone who's going to ask how much something is going to cost, that could make you sound more professional and get you a better deal and take their order.

Art: Plus what you're doing too is you're signaling to them that, "I still need to ask you more questions."

Jim: Absolutely. Absolutely. And speaking of which, let's go to question Number Nine. My wife, and you know my wife Art, Bernadette. She's got a PhD in curriculum design. She's very precise and she corrected me on this. I used, the question, "What's – W-H-A-T-'S, what's your criteria for making a decision?" My way of thinking is it just sounds better, but the proper way to ask the question is, "What are your criteria for making a decision?"

So "What" is grammatically correct and one just sounds better than the other.

Art: But that whole criteria, criterion thing. I can never get that right.

Jim: Yeah, well neither can I obviously. But I'll tell you what, it's a great question, and I think sales people don't even think to ask it because they just assume it's price to everybody. So when you ask this question, "What's your criteria for making a decision on this \$100,000 dollar instrument?" As an example, they're going to give you the criteria, "Well it's going to be this and then it's going to be this and then it's going to be this."

If it were all universally based on price, all of the people that you and I talk to would all be driving Yugos. The same color, medium features and \$12,500 dollar cars. But that's not the case. People have taste and they have style and they have budgets for what you're selling.

Art: Well one thing too, is that sometimes sales people are so afraid that their price is going to be high they forget to take into account that there are some people that want only the best, and they're not even considering that because they're so fearful of, "Well what are they going to say about my price?"

Jim: Well you're absolutely right on that. I would rather be selling the higher priced product - and this goes to your listeners - who should develop a New York attitude on this one. When somebody says, "Your price is higher than theirs." The attitude should be, "We know." But then you say, "And there's a good reason for that." Then you don't say anything because it forces the other person to think, "Well I know their price is higher and there's a good reason for that." It forces somebody to think, "Well it must have to do with quality."

Art: Why is that?

Jim: The beauty of making a statement like that is that your not slamming the competition, your allowing the person your talking with to form his own conclusion. Another thing that I would encourage your listeners to say is something like this; "Do you think if they could get our price they wouldn't try?" And what does that do? That is just asking them "How do you rationalize, okay I'm going to get a better product for the lower price?"

"Do you think if they could get our price they wouldn't try?" It neutralizes the fact that you have a higher price and puts them to question why their (the competition's) price isn't higher.

Art: I love that question. I'm just writing it down here.

Jim: You're writing it down?

Art: Yes.

Jim: Okay that'll be a good experiment. But let me just finish up this question, "What's your criteria for making a decision?" Because you will get people that say, "Well Art, for our organization's bottom line, it's got to be price." Now remember, we have only begun. We've been asking questions. We haven't done a presentation. What we want to do is we want to just set this aside. We don't want to do any kind of debate about price. So I want you to imagine somebody saying, "Jim, well honest, it's bottom line price." Then Jim responds, "Well Art, in addition to price, what other criteria do you have?" You just set it aside. "In addition to price what other criteria do you have?"

Very few people - there's a couple of...I call them lunatics...out there, but there's very few people who only or exclusively make a decision on price. For most people, just set it aside and ask them about other criteria, and then they'll start talking to you about the other criteria.

Art: Well what they're doing now is they're defining how they're really going to buy, which is going to be how they're defining value.

Jim: Exactly, exactly. Now this question, and question 10, makes me think about this; I have put these questions in what I believe to be a logical sequence, and for anybody who's listening to this, if you feel better changing some of these around that's fine. But question nine, the criteria question, and question 10 should not be changed in terms of the order that they appear in, because I found that when I asked the next question first, people often responded with the criteria because they didn't understand it.

When you get the criteria out of the way, this is a question you would ask for big deals. If this is a \$400 dollar sale or a \$1400 dollar sale I would probably not ask this question. But if it's a \$25,000 or whatever is considered a big sale in your business, if it's big you definitely want to ask this question. The question is – "Describe the decision-making process for this, for this project, for this building, for whatever it is you're selling, describe the decision-making process." Then let them tell you.

If they mention names, you want to get the spelling of the names. If they talk about a sequence, if they talk about timing, or a timeframe. And the bigger the deal, I'll tell you based on my experience, the bigger the deal the more people will be involved. And you need to know who they are. That's at least my opinion.

Art: And really analyzing this, not to make it too complicated, but what they're also doing is now they're visualizing what steps they would have to take in order to purchase from you. And it's true that people actually will not take action until they can actually see themselves doing something. So now they're mapping it out in their mind and they're attaching actions to people, to timeframes. So this question's a lot deeper, or the results for you are a lot deeper, than they seem on the surface.

Jim: Yeah, and once they are finished with their response you just might want to ask again, "Is there anything else involved in this decision-making process?" Because you can almost set up a pie chart based on what they said, and this allows you to make a follow-up calls based on that decision-making process.

Art: Something else about the order of your questions; if you notice, I don't know which one it was, where you asked about what are your priorities.

Jim: Right.

Art: So that's more of a general question, but of course now as we're drilling down we're getting a little bit more specific with decision type questions and product related questions. So the order obviously is very logical.

Jim: Art, your very observant, and right about these questions. We are indeed starting to drill down. There's a reason for putting these questions a little bit later versus a little bit earlier, and that is to not ask these questions without a relationship. You wouldn't get the kind of responses that you will get if you ask maybe eight or nine other questions before you get to these questions.

One of my favorite questions is Number 11. It can be asked three ways; in past tense, present tense or future tense. The question is, "How do you measure success?" Let me go back and use my own business as an example. If I'm talking to somebody who has had previous sales training for his sales team I would ask, "How have you measured success with the sales trainers that you

brought in?" I could ask them, "How are you measuring success with the sales trainers that you're using?" Or if he says, "This is our first attempted sales training." the question would be, "How are you planning to manage the success of a one day sales training program?"

Now what happens here is a number of things – sometimes they'll say, "Boy that's a good question. I've never given that any thought." Now when somebody says, "Boy that's a good question," I think that's the highest compliment somebody can pay you. And while I think of it, if in 30-days it's not said to you, "Boy that's a good question," well maybe you're not asking really good questions?"

But this question, "How do you measure success?" I've been asking this question for 18-years and just a quick little anecdote. I used to teach sales management classes for the American Management Association, and six months after I did one program a gentleman from South Carolina, a sales manager, calls up and he says, "Jim I was in your class," and I happen to remember who he was. He says, "I'm having a one-day sales meeting. We do this once a year and let me tell you about my business. We sell drum chemicals. It's a very boring product. I have 50 men, no women and their average age is 55."

Now I'm thinking, "Boy is this going to be fun." So I asked him all my questions and I got to this last one. I said, "Bill how will you measure the success of my spending one day with your sales team?" Then he repeated himself, "Well I told you we do this once a year." He said, "I've got 50 guys. We don't sell an incredible product necessarily." He said, "And they'll all be getting on in years, it's a little long in the tooth at 55." He said, "Oh I got it." He says, "In the afternoon if nobody's sleeping they're good."

And I've got to tell you, let me just share with you and your listeners, that was phenomenal, because when I got into my presentation I could tell him exactly the exercises, the activities that I was going to do to keep his people awake, and that's what he wanted. So it's a great question – how do you measure success?

Art: Actually I love the tense part of it. So you can ask past tense – "How have you in the past", which will certainly give you one set of answers. "How do you now," which will give you another set of answers. And then, "How will you." One thing people should really think about all the time; whenever your preparing questions, always think about what are your possible answers. So then you formulate your follow-up questions to those as well. And I'm sitting here thinking about all of these and my mind's just racing. Great questions!

Jim: Well good. Now we have one more question, and then I'm thinking we still have a few minutes. What I'd like to do is after we do the next question, and after any comment that you may have about the question, I'd like to share with

your Platinum members an example of a segway, a transition that goes from the last question to the beginning of a sales presentation. Would that be okay?

Art: Oh yeah, please do.

Jim: Okay, Question Number 12 (And if anybody asks, some of these questions have changed because I'm continually yanking a question, inserting a new question and trying to keep it to the number 12.) So this is a relatively new question, and I think I may have been watching the Academy Awards one year when this popped into my mind, but the question is "What would it take to win your supplier of the year award?"

"Now what would it take to win your supplier of the year award?" Part of this, the rationale for asking this question, is as follows – sales people are generally too quick to try to sell how good they are and how good their company is and how good their product or service is. Were the best at this and so forth and so on.

But when you ask this question you can forget about that sales battle. By asking the core, you're letting somebody know that you are very interested in knowing what it takes to win the supplier of the year because you want to provide the best service, the best price. So it's built into the question, and you get a number of different responses. They might respond, "We don't have a supplier of the year award." Then you could simply say, "Well if you did, what would it take to win that award?" They'll have an opinion on that. They're going to feel good about you in the process.

Art: It's a great catch all question at the end in case there are some things that they haven't told you yet.

Jim: Okay, now you've asked your questions, and let's say one or two things are going to happen. If it's a face-to-face call, if you're out-of-town you have come back, or if you have ample time to begin, you want to give your sales presentation. Here's what I'm going to suggest, and don't do this if your driving in a car, but if you have a pencil and a piece of paper jot this down because I think this is a perfect segway.

Now you've asked your last question, you've gotten the response, and then you say something like this, "Jack, based on what you just told me..." When you say that to somebody what does that say about you?

Art: That I've listened.

Jim: Yeah. So here's a statement that plants this thought, "Okay, my sales person has been listening" - right? Jim Meisenheimer's been listening to me. "Based on what you just told me, I'd like to show you how we would..." and then you finish that off based on what his challenges are, or what your products are.

That second piece says you're going to give them a tailored presentation and think about it. Your going to give him a presentation based on what they just told you.

You do not have to do the dog and pony show. If you find yourself making sales calls and saying the same things over and over again, it's a dog and pony show. The only time you should do a dog and pony show is if somebody says, "Hey I need a dog and I need a pony." I'm serious. That's how I work.

Art: So many sales reps use the word 'pitch', and I've written about this before. I hate using the word 'pitch' outside of a baseball or a softball context. And there's no way you could have your sales presentation - I don't even like to use the word 'presentation', I'd call it recommendation - and what you say next is all based on the answers to these 12 words.

Jim: Yeah, it makes me whince when sales people do that, but the questions work. I don't want this to sound too boastful, but if it helps one or more of your listeners to be motivated to ask the questions, I've made millions of dollars with these questions. I have to make the sale before I do the training program. I don't have a staff. I ask these questions over the phone. I'm getting ready to call somebody who called me yesterday. Local company in Sarasota, Florida and I'm going to ask each question. Now I don't have to look at them. They're not typed up anymore. I know them like the back of the hand.

Art: I've added a couple to my repertoire here as well.

Jim: Well good.

Art: Jim the people who are listening to this are elite sales people - people who are, or they plan to be - and they're people who have invested in themselves. Let me ask you one final question here – what one tip could you give for salespeople who really just want to explode their sales growth and reach the next level more quickly?

Jim: Nothing will do it faster, nothing will give you a bigger boost in income, and nothing will improve your perception from the customer's perspective better and quicker than asking thought provoking questions.

Now a good question is like a burning ember. It lingers. And that's with some of these questions. They'll linger on after you've asked them.

Art: Great stuff. Hey, you mentioned several times your book, that's based on of course, these questions. And I know that you have several other books as well as a lot of other learning programs, an e-mail newsletter, and you also have coaching programs for sales reps. You do national sales meetings, you have

boot camps – could you just share with our listeners how people can get in contact with you and take advantage of some of these materials?

Jim: Yeah, the easiest way to do that is simply to go to my website - and I wish my name was Jones, but it's Meisenheimer. Let me just spell it very quickly, it's M-E-I-S-E-N-H-E-I-M-E-R, Meisenheimer.com. And when you go to the home page there's an e-course that's on closing that's FREE. I just published "The Two Most Powerful Words In The English Language" which is new and FREE. And, I have a new e-book, a digital book, and it's FREE. It's way a for me to build relationships with people who don't presently know me and it's called [12 Dazzling Strategies to Help You Increase Sales and Make More Money](#). You'll see a link on my home page to do that as well.

Art: I have seen that, and I encourage everybody listening to go get that right now, and also sign up for Jim's e-mail newsletter.

Jim: Oh yeah, I forgot that. Thanks Art.

Art: All right. Well Jim, once again thanks for sharing your "12 Best Questions to Ask Customers." I'm sure everyone is going to get tremendous value from those. Also, thanks for sharing your insights. Until next time, this is the Platinum Member's Audio Seminar.